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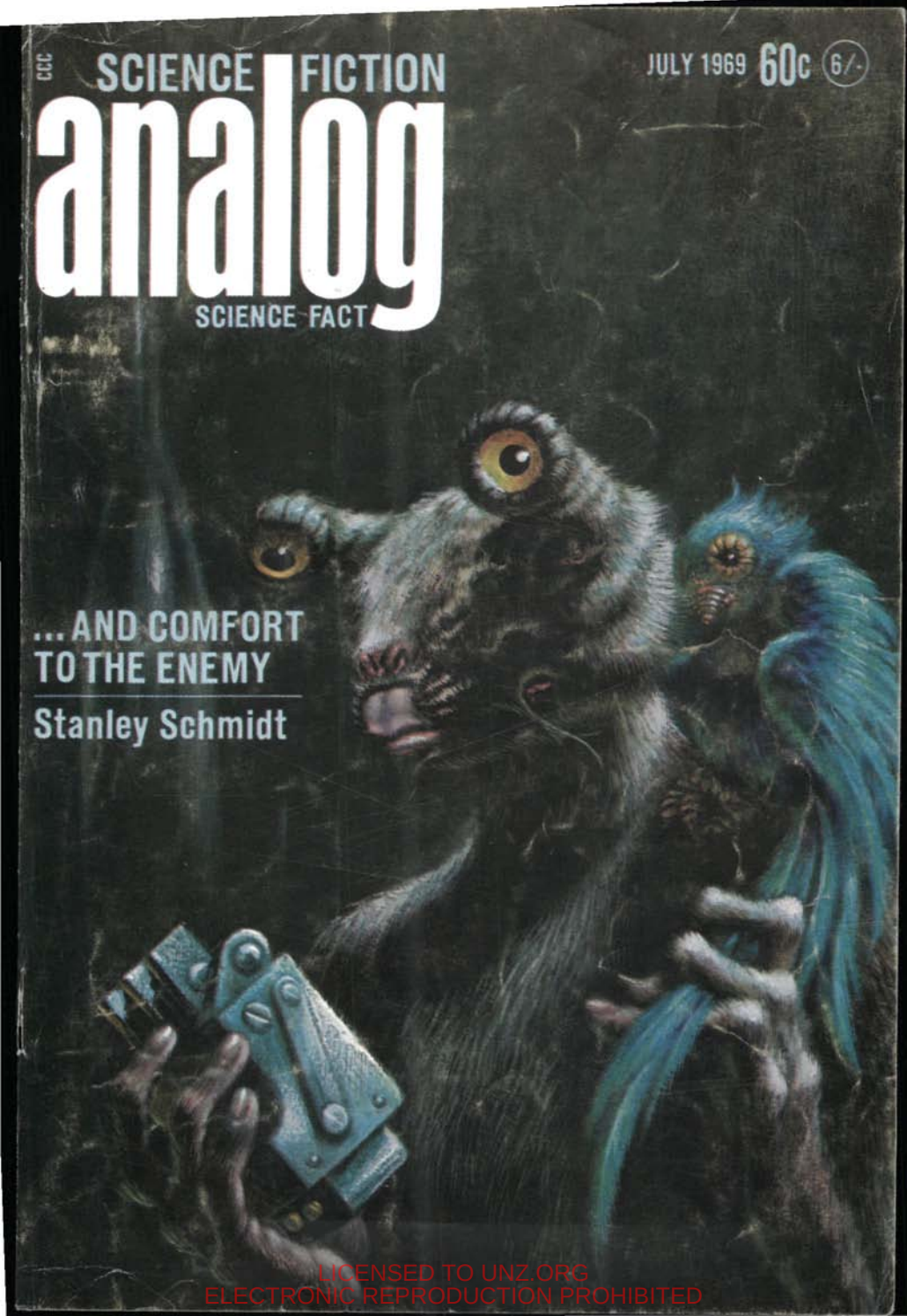

... AND COMFORT TO THE ENEMY

Stanley Schmidt

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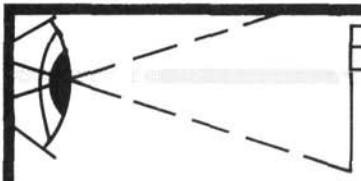

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE
JULY 8, 1969
$6.00 per year
in the U.S.A.
60 cents per copy

Cover by
Kelly Freas

Vol. LXXXIII, No. 5 July 1969

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Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact is published monthly by the Condé Nast Publications Inc. Executive, Publishing, Editorial and Advertising offices: 420 Lexington Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10017. Perry L. Ruston, President; Fred C. Thormann, Treasurer; Mary E. Campbell, Secretary. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions: in U.S. possessions and Canada, $6 for one year, $10 for two years, $13 for three years. Elsewhere, $8 for one year, $16 for two years. Payable in advance. Single copies: In U.S. possessions and Canada, 60¢. For subscriptions, address changes and adjustments, write to Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact, Box 2205, Boulder, Colorado 80302. Six weeks are required for change of address. The editorial contents have not been published before, are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publisher's permission. All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental. We cannot accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work. Any material submitted must include return postage.

POSTMASTER: SEND FORM 3579 to ANALOG SCIENCE FICTION/SCIENCE FACT, BOX 2205, BOULDER, COLORADO 80302.

EDITORIAL AND
ADVERTISING OFFICES:
420 LEXINGTON AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017

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The Lynch-Mob Philosophy

editorial by John W. Campbell

The Federal Communications Commission recently announced that they planned to ban all cigarette advertising on radio and TV, as soon as the present law expires. Currently, the law forbids them to carry out any such ban, but as soon as Congress's law expires, they're ready to jump into the act.

Basically, the mood is that of a lynch mob; the mob's decided that Cigarettes Are Guilty, and b'gad they don't need no more evidence, because they already know damn well who's guilty.

They've proved it by showing that cigarette tars, rubbed on a guinea-pig's belly, will cause cancer. Yes, that's true—an amount of tar equivalent to a man smoking about fifty thousand cigarettes a day will, indeed, cause cancer. But my, you'd have to be busy to achieve that—roughly two thousand cigarettes per hour, day and night. You'd have to use some kind of a multiple holder, so you could consume at least fifty cigarettes at once, and have someone loading spare holders for you because you wouldn't have time to do all that loading . . .

Incidentally, it's also true that Vitamin A or Vitamin D are poisonous—painfully lethal—in equivalent overdose. As a matter of fact, both water and salt are also one hundred percent lethal in 1,000-times overdose.

Studies made in South Africa and Australia, where the per capita consumption of cigarettes is higher than in the United States, but the air-pollution level is lower, show that nonsmokers in the United States have a higher lung cancer rate than heavy smokers in those areas.

But those annoying objections to the already-decided Guilty verdict don't bother the lynch-mob philosophy. "The varmint's guilty; lynch him and git it over with!"

No study has been made as to why people *do* smoke—why the human race took up this improbable habit in the first place. No, it's been determined-without-trial that "it's just a habit."

Prithee, wise sirs, tell me how you acquire a habit *without* trying it out first? How do you *get* "just a habit" unless you've tried it and liked it often enough to establish a habit?

How did Mankind, all over the world, come to devote precious time, effort and land, in subsistence and near-subsistence level cultures, to grow the weed of no nutritional value? How did men, who'd been trying for ages unnumbered to

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keep smoke from getting in their eyes, while using cooking fires, come to start inhaling the stuff?

"Just a habit?" How stupid an answer can you get? Tibetan farmers didn't have the tobacco habit, and starvation was a normal part of their life—yet they gave up some of their scanty land to tobacco when it was introduced.

But the Learned Lynchers are not interested in contrary indications or questions. They've already decided the case, and no evidence is needed.

They've now decided to cut advertising off the air, to protect the public from the varmint they intend to lynch. Fifty thousand people a year, they say, are killed by the Demon Tobacco; they intend to protect us poor ignorant citizens from this evil.

Just as the Women's Christian Temperance Union most intemperately acted to get legislation to protect citizens against the Demon Rum, even though they had to pass a Constitutional amendment to do it. If the idea was good enough for the WCTU, why it's considered a good one by the Learned Lynchers of tobacco.

But since the FCC is nobly going to protect us stupid citizens from the menace of Demon Tobacco because—they claim—of those fifty thousand deaths a year, let's not be pikers. Let's go the whole way, and do something really useful.

For instance, automobiles kill a lot more people every year than Demon Tobacco. Automobiles lead to a life of crime, they impair the morals of minors—most cars are stolen by minors—and serve as the first step on the road to complete degradation and a life of crime. Most bank robbers turn out to be automobile drivers, for instance. And certainly the toll of death and injury caused by automobiles is far higher than that even the Learned Lynchers claim for the Demon Tobacco.

Clearly, automobile advertising must be ruled off the air at once.

Then there are dozens of other menaces to public health that must be attacked, while we're lynching evil and health-destroying things.

Consider high fat-content foods, for instance. It's well known that overweight is one of America's great problems—overweight definitely leads to shortened life, and poor health. Isn't it clearly the FCC's duty to ban this constant advertising of fattening things like margarines, fancy baked goods, and rich foods from the air? Certainly the medical profession will back up the statement that overeating is a major health hazard in this country; should we permit advertising of this hazard?

Then an even worse attack on public health by the purveyors of temptation—in almost every TV program intended for kids, you'll find advertisement after advertise-

continued on page 175

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. . . and comfort to the enemy

It's a little hard to imagine what could give a race with an interstellar spaceship technology so severe a racial trauma that they never, never, never insulted strangers again. . . .!

STANLEY SCHMIDT
Illustrated by Kelly Freas

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Carla felt the chill of approaching winter more than I did. I had been here for nearly a year, and for all that time the twenty-year winter had been advancing stealthily as the Little Sun hurtled away toward aphelion. I was used to the cold. But Carla had only come out from Earth to join me a few days ago, after my boss finally decided to make my assignment here permanent. Spending all that time in Florida had done little to prepare her for the bleak hills and cold air here.

Today I was showing her Centaurus Historical Park, jointly maintained by humans and Redskins as a memorial to their first meeting here a few decades earlier. The climb from the quaint little Mayflower *village was strenuous enough to take her mind off the cold, and she showed revived interest as we strolled among the historic boulders on the hilltop. Hardly anyone else was there, either human or Redskin (a corruption of "Reska" which happened to fit), so we could read the plaques set in the rock faces at our leisure.*

Carla paused for a long time in front of the one which told how the first Redskins here had had to be rescued from their own laws against antagonizing alien races—laws which to civilized humans seemed almost incredibly harsh. Finally she said quietly, "Mike, I think that's why I feel uneasy about them."

"Huh?" I said, surprised. "Who?"

"The Redskins." She drew her sweater tighter around her shoulders and motioned toward the plaque. "They were going to slaughter their own people because one of them might *have trivially annoyed a human. I know there's been no trouble since, but I can't help thinking there's something sinister about them that may show up someday.* Humans *wouldn't treat their own like that!"*

I put my arm around her and tried to think how to dispel her vague worries. Thoughts like that weren't going to make frontier life any easier for her. Before I found words, an unmistakably accented voice behind us said quietly, "Please don't be too sure of that."

Carla jumped a foot and whirled around with a little shriek to find herself facing a Redskin. He was shorter than Carla, hairless, his skin toughened and darkened almost to brown by age and work, and his face might have been drawn by a human caricaturist. But I hoped Carla would recognize his smile and the twinkle in his eyes. Just in case, I hastened to introduce her. "Carla, this is Kirlatsu, a good friend of mine from the day I landed here and a real old-timer on the Reska spaceways. Kirlatsu, my wife, Carla."

Kirlatsu extended his hand and Carla took it, a trifle timidly. "Very happy to meet you, Carla," he told her. "I'm sorry if I startled you.

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But I overheard your comment, and I wouldn't want Mike's wife to get the wrong idea. Our colonization laws are *extreme—but so were the events that produced them. I know. I was there.*

"I knew Ngasik well. Our paths crossed in several sirla *during our* dlazöl, *and though he was four years older, we were close friends on Slepo IV . . ."*

The last time Kirlatsu actually saw Ngasik was the night the first tunnel ship came. When dusk fell they and a few other young men of Sirla Tsardong still sat—as usual—around a flickering campfire, plying Ngasik for the tales he told so well at the end of a hard day's work. His supply was seemingly inexhaustible—nobody could remember hearing him repeat a yarn—and his gift of gab held listeners enthralled for hours. But tonight stories were not forthcoming.

Instead Ngasik's gaze kept wandering off to the uninvited new ship, a hundred yards away at the other end of the clearing. The big gibbous moon and fireflies flitting in and out of the forest gave enough light to make out its ludicrous outline, with the top half a mirror image of the bottom, but little more. Its crew had retired into it for the night, and a couple of ports still glowed in its side. Ngasik would stop in midsentence, stare wistfully at those ports, and murmur things like, "They've come all the way out here just to do away with the one way of life that really suited me!"

Finally one of the others laughed at him. "Come on, Ngasik! This doesn't come as a shock to anybody. We've been hearing progress reports on tunnel-ship development for a couple of years now. And why should you care? You're no criminal."

Ngasik couldn't see exactly who had spoken, but he glared across the fire at the voice. "For some of us," he said coolly, "space was the one place we could find something like independence. What's it going to be with government inspectors coming out in their own ships to check up on us all the time?"

"Safer," his critic muttered. A couple of people on the other side of the fire got up and went to their huts. Kirlatsu, here on his first job, did not yet find alien wilderness as congenial as Ngasik. He suggested mildly, "The only reason we haven't had them from the start is that warp ships are too expensive to run without a big payload, and we didn't know there was another way. Maybe it's a good idea. Suppose some sirla met another race with an advanced technology and decided to stir up trouble. If that had happened before there were tunnel ships to patrol the colonies . . ."

"Frankly," Ngasik interrupted, "I don't think anybody seriously expects that to happen. I've been in space four years—some people for sixteen. No sign of alien intelli-

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gence. The old philosophers were right. We're probably unique, a long shot that hit once."

By ones and twos, members of the circle gave up on getting the usual stories and drifted off to their huts. Eventually only Ngasik and Kirlatsu remained. Lacking the distraction of Ngasik's narrative, Kirlatsu grew more and more conscious of the wild noises from the surrounding forest, and they made him uncomfortable. They seemed even louder and more persistent than usual tonight—especially those deep, wavering, chilling howls. And the bugs were intensely annoying—the dome of fence-field over the camp was fine for keeping out *big prowling animals*, but nearly worthless against small crawling and flying things. Kirlatsu found himself swatting at them constantly. Finally, losing his temper, he raised a heavily shod foot and stamped viciously at a beetlelike thing on the ground, so big it must have found a "soft" place in the field between two generators to get in. As it died, it emitted a long moan, high-pitched and falling. To Kirlatsu it sounded exactly like, ". . . Shot that hit once."

"Did you hear that?" he gasped.

Ngasik shrugged. "Mimic," he said. "Not uncommon. I've seen a couple of those around lately. Didn't know they did that, though."

Kirlatsu stood up. "My imagination's running away with me," he said apologetically. "Good night, Ngasik." He went off to his hut, a modest but comfortable structure of native rock and wood, and locked himself in. Shortly he heard Ngasik extinguishing the fire and going off to his own hut, and stretched out to try to sleep.

It's not *just my imagination!* Kirlatsu thought defensively as sleep continued to elude him. *There's something different in the air tonight. Something's brewing. Those noises really* are *worse.* The forest seemed to scream at him. A plaintive, agitated series of those howls sounded nearby. Another seemed to answer it from far off.

Suddenly there were sounds *very* nearby—the rustles and thumps of large animals moving in the grass, and a familiar chattering. Kirlatsu knew even before he jumped up to look out his window that they were tsapeli, but he had never known them to come this close to camp before.

He saw three dark forms prowling just at the edge of the invisible dome. They stopped. Standing very still, they cautiously began to look intently around the camp. Three pairs of eyes began to glow faint green, and then gradually grew and brightened until they were piercing white searchlights. One of them nearly blinded Kirlatsu when it looked right at his hut window. Then the eyes dimmed again and the tsapeli were running toward the invisible shell, hurling themselves

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against it, bouncing off and trying again.

Kirlatsu began to feel very uncomfortable. He knew—intellectually, at least—that the tsapeli couldn't get through that wall. But the very idea that they would *try* was alarming. In the three months since the sirla established itself here, he had thought of the tsapeli as picturesque creatures of the night, rather eerie with their searchlight eyes and mantis faces, but not dangerous as long as nobody went outside at night and chased them. Now they were making a deliberate effort to break into camp.

He was relieved to hear Ngasik's voice outside, summoning any and all to help him chase the pests off. Young men made brave by fence-field, flashlights, and numbers swarmed from their huts. Kirlatsu joined them.

In the flashlight beams the tsapeli could be seen more clearly. Monkeylike, with prehensile tail and four hands of which they could walk on two or four, they were as large as adult Reska. Smooth black fur covered them almost completely, even most of the head—a small sphere housing mouth, nostrils, and a pair of triangular "wings" with eyes at the tips and ears farther in.

They stood their ground, all three chattering at once and staring back at the Reska with eyes glowing at full strength. After a moment of that, Ngasik started a noise-making and hand-waving campaign. He was obviously enjoying himself until he saw that the tsapeli were just waving back and chattering louder.

And then a metallic gleam at the far end of the clearing revealed at least a dozen tsapeli surrounding the *Tsulan,* the government tunnel ship that had come in this afternoon.

Just at that moment Tsardong-li, local boss of Sirla Tsardong, popped out of his hut demanding to know what was going on. He didn't finish asking before he saw for himself. He yelped, "Get those critters away from here—and away from that ship!"

"We're working on it," Ngasik told him cheerfully. "They don't seem very anxious to go."

"Well, *make* them go!" Tsardong-li ordered. "All of you—take guns outside if you have to. Just get rid of them. Don't come back until they're gone!"

Within two minutes a very hesitant Kirlatsu was running back out of his hut with gun and key in hand and joining the group streaming out of the dome—while Tsardong-li stayed inside to shout useless encouragements. Each man approached the shell on the run, pointing his key straight ahead so it canceled just enough fence-field to let him through. The tsapeli tried to find the holes they saw Reska coming through, and had to be chased away with shots.

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Faced with actual weapon fire, they finally turned and fled, bounding away on all fours—straight toward the larger group around the *Tsulan*. As the Reska converged on the ship, all the tsapeli gathered there turned to face them, staring blindingly. Their chattering changed to shrill sirenlike noises. Just before he began shooting, Kirlatsu could barely hear a fresh chorus of howls start up in the nearby forest.

As soon as the shooting started, the tsapeli began jumping wildly around, but made no move to leave. Between their blazing eyes and their erratic jumping, decent aim was impossible and the Reska scored few hits. The only consolation, Kirlatsu thought wryly, was that the tsapeli weren't shooting back.

Then he heard the rustle of wings and looked up to see dozens of big, sharp-beaked, beacon-eyed "birds" emerging from the forest and swooping down among the Reska. Suddenly the Reska were too busy warding off birds—none too successfully—to keep up very steady firing. The flying things were diving quickly and unpredictably, inflicting nasty stabs and poking at Reska weapons, keys, and lights.

Just as he managed to shoot a bird that was coming after him, Kirlatsu saw Ngasik's gun knocked from his hand by another. Immediately four or five tsapeli ran out, oblivious of birds and gunfire, and surrounded Ngasik. Kirlatsu saw them coming and so did another Reska who was momentarily free. They both opened fire on the same tsapeli and blasted him to a pulp. Then they had their hands full of birds again, while the other tsapeli who had rushed Ngasik grabbed him and quickly subdued his struggles. Carrying him easily, they vanished into the forest. Two others roughly grabbed up the remains of the demolished tsapeli and followed them.

In less than a minute no tsapeli was in sight, but the birds continued their diving and slashing for some ten minutes. Their numbers never seemed to diminish—when one was shot down, another came out of the forest. Then, as abruptly as they had come, the survivors scattered and vanished.

The Reska were too badly shaken by the experience, and too riddled with physical injuries, to attempt pursuit. Instead they returned, as fast as if pursued themselves, to the safety of the dome. They neither saw nor heard any more of Ngasik that night, and could only reconstruct its events later.

Ngasik gave up struggling almost immediately; it was a waste of energy. His captors were all too capable of keeping viselike grips on him even while plunging through the pitch-dark forest on winding trails nearly overgrown with smelly bushes. To Ngasik's diurnal eyes

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their speed seemed reckless, but for the nocturnal tsapeli this was normal lighting. The powerful beams their eyes could produce were reserved for short periods of unusually critical observation. Quite likely they had been evolved less as sensory aids than as weapons against other nocturnal animals.

Between jolts, as his four bearers ran unevenly over the rough ground, Ngasik found himself reflecting that his deliberate abduction by four of them in cooperation was rather odd behavior for jungle beasts. Moreover, they were still chattering intermittently, in ways no Reska could hope to imitate, but Ngasik began to feel strongly that they were talking among themselves. Maybe his comment to Kirlatsu at the campfire had been a bit presumptuous. From a practical point of view, he wasn't at all sure that being the first Reska to be captured by intelligent alien savages was especially preferable to being captured by unintelligent alien monsters.

In the darkness and traveling on feet not his own, Ngasik found it very hard to estimate distances, but he guessed that they went perhaps a mile before they stopped. He wished he had been able to tell more about the route. All members of the sirla carried two-way radio handsets in the field, and if the tsapeli didn't take his he would try to call Kirlatsu at the first chance. But not knowing where he was, relative to camp, would make it very hard to help the sirla plot his rescue.

He could see only that they had paused in front of one of those huge fungoid growths sirla workers had often seen in the forest and sometimes mistaken for rocks. This one was at least ten feet high and surrounded by thorny bushes. A tsapeli hurried forward from the rear of the procession and looked ready to rush right into the bushes. He did, in fact, but they parted with a loud rustle at his approach, exposing a gaping opening. The bushes stayed apart as the rest of the procession followed him into the cavernous interior of the fungoid, and snapped back together as soon as the last tsapeli was inside.

There were many more fireflies inside than out, but not nearly enough for Ngasik. The tsapeli put him down, letting him stand on his own feet but keeping tight holds on his arms. At first he could see nothing except the lazily flying points of light. His strongest initial impression was the powerful mixture of odors that filled the place, most of them recognizably organic and many almost nauseating. But as seconds passed his eyes adjusted enough so he could make out the forms standing around him, some erect and some down on all fours, and another door leading to deeper darkness at the back of the room. Next to that door a birdlike thing perched on what looked like a de-

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foliated tree branch, so still that Ngasik wasn't sure if it were alive. But he was quite relieved to see that it had a short, innocuous-looking beak, quite unlike those vicious things that had joined the attack on the Reska back at the clearing.

The first tsapeli in crowded close to the side walls, and Ngasik could see well enough to feel slightly sick as the two carrying the badly wounded one came in and crossed in front of him. They carried their burden with utter lack of care—though the victim was in such bad shape that he was probably beyond caring. Only part of his face, marked with a distinctive white crescent, was recognizably intact. Most of his body was bloody and practically shredded. The left eye was thoroughly smashed.

One of the carriers emitted a short burst of loud chatter as they crossed the room. The tsapeli holding Ngasik followed them to a far corner, dragging Ngasik along. They paused next to a big, shapeless sack resting in a recess in the wall. Another tsapeli emerged from the back room and joined them. The newcomer quickly looked the victim over, with apparent disinterest, and then watched as each of Ngasik's captors used one hand to help pull a long slit open at the top of the sack.

Ngasik quickly looked away and then back. The sack was partly filled with a dark, vile-smelling liquid, richly populated with writhing wormlike things of many shapes and sizes. Battling nausea, though he was not normally squeamish, he forced himself to watch as the victim was dumped unceremoniously into that mess, landing with a dull splash. Then his captors let the sack snap shut again, and all the tsapeli walked unconcernedly away from it. Most of them left through the front door, exchanging chatter as they went. The one from the back room and Ngasik's bodyguards, again gripping him with both hands, stayed.

The one from the back room moved around in front of Ngasik. Without warning, his eyes glowed brightly and swept Ngasik from head to toe. The examination lasted perhaps ten seconds; then darkness returned and Ngasik felt something slimy slapped on his arm, followed by a faint tickling sensation where it was. He had shut his eyes when the tsapeli's had suddenly started glowing, so he could almost immediately see the big leechlike thing sucking on his skin. Automatically, he yelled, "Hey, get that thing off me!"

Not very surprisingly, they ignored him. He didn't bother to yell again. After two or three long minutes, the same tsapeli disengaged the leech and carried it through the second door. Oddly, there were no fireflies in the back room, and the tsapeli with the leech used a little green light from his eyes. Ngasik

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could faintly see an unusual variety of small fungoids growing on the floor and walls back there, but he couldn't tell what the tsapeli was doing.

In a few minutes the keeper of the leech returned, emitted a piercing sirenlike burst, and then chattered briefly to the others. In a few seconds a very large and ugly carnivore, its entire body slightly luminescent, came bounding in through the front door. Ngasik stiffened. His captors let go of him and walked casually out the front door.

He glanced after them in surprise, then looked warily back at the saber-toothed carnivore. The one remaining tsapeli motioned meaningfully at the beast, chattered briefly, and left Ngasik alone with it.

Ngasik and the big meat-eater watched each other motionlessly for several minutes. Finally Ngasik nerved himself to try a dash for the door.

The carnivore got there first, blocking the door with its body. A blood-curdling rumble arose from deep down its wide-open throat. Ngasik changed his mind about leaving.

It was an hour before he worked up the courage to try sneaking across to the back room. Again the carnivore talked him out of it.

"O.K.," he muttered, "I'll stay. Can't say as I care for your hospitality, though."

He tried to sleep, but with little success. For one thing, he couldn't feel very secure with that watchdog in the room. For another, he kept hearing snatches of that eerie howling, outside but closer than he had ever heard it before.

Morning broke tranquil and innocuous at the Reska camp. Dead birds had been removed by scavengers and the nocturnal hordes were quiet. The tall grass in the clearing and the trees of the surrounding forest waved gently in erratic breezes, flashing bright green under clear purple sky. Beads of dew still glistened on the grass, and the tiny yellow and white diurnal arthropods so numerous in grassy clearings were out in full force. The only slightly unfamiliar note was the crop of large, flat-topped "mushrooms" which had sprung up overnight among the huts.

Kirlatsu stood by his hut and watched, with a feeling he had been spared until now, as the work crews of the sirla started out for the day. As communications specialist—radio tech, in less bombastic language—he would probably stay close to camp all day. But most of the other groups—explorers, miners, fur trappers, gatherers of plants already found useful—were going out into the fields and forests as if nothing had happened last night.

Well—*almost* as if nothing had happened. Today every man was armed, which was not standard

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operating procedure. Most had taken their weapons out spontaneously. Then Tsardong-li had made it mandatory.

Most of the men wore bandages. And Ngasik was not with his group.

Kirlatsu idly kicked one of the new mushrooms and noticed that it was too tough to care. Then he looked up and noticed Dzukarl, the Arbiter from Reslaka, hurrying toward him from the *Tsulan*. Dzukarl, Kirlatsu reflected, was the focus of Ngasik's resentment of the tunnel ships. Kirlatsu wasn't sure where he stood in that matter. He hadn't really understood why his friend was so bothered by the new ships. But then Ngasik *had* been in space a lot longer than he had . . .

Dzukarl stopped in front of him and demanded crisply, "Where's Tsardong-li?"

"In his hut, I suppose, sir."

"I want to talk to him."

"Yes, sir." Kirlatsu called the boss on his handset and relayed the message. A minute later Tsardong-li approached.

Without waiting for him to arrive, Dzukarl snapped, "Tsardong-li, what was all that infernal racket last night?"

"Wild animals," Tsardong-li answered calmly as he joined them. "Big things we call 'tsapeli.' We've seen them before. A bit more restless than usual last night . . . I think your ship shook them up."

"A bit more restless!" Kirlatsu blurted out, incredulous that Tsardong-li was treating the incident so lightly. "They got Ngasik—" Then he saw Tsardong-li glaring at him with personalized fury, realized he was out of line, and shut up.

Dzukarl turned to Kirlatsu. "Oh, really? They got one of your men, did they? Tell me about it, young fellow."

Horribly embarrassed and afraid of what Tsardong-li would do to him later, but at the same time worried about Ngasik and afraid to defy an Arbiter, Kirlatsu told. When he finished, Dzukarl turned back to Tsardong-li and said coolly, "You didn't mention any of that."

Tsardong-li stammered a little and Dzukarl added accusingly, "Sounds like intelligent behavior to me."

"Or pack behavior," Tsardong-li said, "which seems a lot more likely. Anyway, we're planning a rescue operation."

"Planning?" Dzukarl echoed in shocked tones. "And meanwhile your men are going about their jobs as if nothing's wrong, while one of them is out there in the jungle, maybe being—"

Kirlatsu's radio buzzed sharply. Dzukarl cut off in midsentence to listen as Kirlatsu received the call.

Ngasik's voice came through clearly enough to recognize and understand easily. There was noticeable noise, but not too much: he was well within the range of these

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little transceivers. "This is the first chance I've had to call," he said. He sounded drowsy. "I'm not hurt —yet. Don't know what they have in mind for me. They have a big ugly monster guarding me, but nobody's paying much attention now that the sun's up. Can't go anywhere, though. This watchdog's a light sleeper, and he's got an extra pair of eyelids he can use for sunglasses if he has to."

Kirlatsu asked anxiously, "Where are you, Ngasik?"

"I don't know. I'm in one of those big forest fungoids—the real big ones. It's hollow. But I can't tell where it is, except it's *maybe* a mile or two from camp."

Dzukarl asked, "Are those things intelligent?"

The radio voice laughed curtly. "I don't know. I have the feeling they may be savages on the *brink* of intelligence—but I mean *savages!* Kirlatsu, you know that one that was shot up so badly? Listen to what they did to him . . ." Kirlatsu listened with a sense of horror as Ngasik told about the bag of maggots, or whatever they were. Ngasik finished, "Not even the crudest, most vicious savages on Reslaka would treat their dead that way."

Tsardong-li asked, "Can you tell us anything to help us find you and get you out of there?"

"Please don't—not yet, anyway. You come charging in here with a swarm of armed men and that may be just what it takes to make the tsapeli decide to dump me in a handy maggot bag. I think I have a better idea."

"What?"

"Look, I'm going to have to keep these reports short. I'll tell you if it works. I'll try to call every day, if I stay that long, but I want to be sure my radio power cell gets lots of rest. O.K.? Better stop for now . . ." Kirlatsu's receiver went silent.

Nobody said anything for a few seconds. Then Dzukarl told Tsardong-li, "You should have reported this when it happened. Frankly, I think we got these patrol ships going just in time. I have an ugly hunch we have our first culture-contact crisis developing here. I've half a mind to order you off the planet right now."

"And leave Ngasik?" Tsardong-li snapped. "Besides, I don't think you could. The only laws anybody ever bothered to pass on the subject are pretty explicit about real danger from a culture at least comparable to our own. I hardly think these subhumans qualify."

Dzukarl didn't answer right away, because it was obvious that Tsardong-li also knew the law—such as it was. As it turned out, he didn't answer at all, for at that moment they were interrupted again.

The nearest mushroom said, "Excuse me, gentlemen. May I have your attention for a few moments?"

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After a day of fitful sleep, during which he woke several times but never saw the bird on the branch move, Ngasik finally decided it was time to stay awake and get ready to try his escape "plan." It was risky, but it just might let him get out quickly enough to avoid injury.

Virtually all wild animals feared fire. It seemed reasonable that savages who had not yet learned to control and use it would also fear it. By kindling a bonfire, Ngasik hoped to get his captors so confused and excited that they wouldn't notice if he bolted into the forest.

Kindling a bonfire might not be easy. Because of the watchdog, he would have to do it right in the middle of the floor. There was practically no fuel available—unless the fungus itself burned easily, which Ngasik was a little afraid it might. But it might not take much. He could spare some of the uncomfortable clothes the Reska wore here as protection against the alien environment . . .

His lighter worked well. Darkness had barely become complete outside when the small pile of fabrics burst into leaping orange flames, crackling loudly and filling the room with smoke. For a tense moment Ngasik thought the floor was going to catch, but then he saw it turning dark and wet around the fire. The watchdog leaped up, yelping wildly, and shut the dark membranes over its eyes. It glared menacingly at Ngasik, then glanced at the fire and dashed noisily out the front door.

Ngasik tried to follow, but as he started the painful crawl through the unyielding guard bushes he met several tsapeli on the run. He backed into the room, choking on the smoke, and stood aside as two of the tsapeli came in, followed by a lumbering, armor-skinned quadruped with a huge pointed snout. At a signal from one tsapeli, the quadruped walked up and methodically sprayed the fire with white foam from its snout. The other tsapeli walked—*walked,* not ran—around the fire and did something to the still-motionless bird's head. Immediately the bird flapped its stubby wings and moved onto the tsapeli's shoulder. Almost without stopping, the tsapeli continued around the dying fire. He stopped in front of Ngasik, looked straight at him and gabbled something.

The bird squawked, "That's a no-no."

Ngasik blinked, then shrugged. If one intelligent species here, why not another, physically capable of both tsapeli and Reska speech and for some reason willing to act as a go-between? But then, how had it learned Resorka?

Ngasik hoped to get a chance to speak to the bird alone. For now, he would have to be content with conversing through it.

The Resorka-speaking bird was only one of two surprises of the

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moment. Ngasik commented wryly on the other. "You guys didn't seem exactly terrified of my fire."

The bird chattered like a tsapeli, then the tsapeli himself chattered for a while, then the bird spoke again in Resorka. "No. We don't use it any more—outlawed it long ago as dangerous and unnecessary —but that's hardly cause for irrational fear of it. When one gets started accidentally, we put it out and go about our business. Yours wasn't accidental."

The other tsapeli said something which the bird didn't translate and went back to the dark corner where they had dumped their dead—or at least mortally wounded—compatriot. The one with the bird on his shoulder went along.

Ngasik didn't, since nobody dragged him and he had seen more than enough of what was in that corner. He looked toward the door and toyed with the idea that this might be his chance to escape. Then the armor-plated animal, finished putting out the fire, lumbered out. The bushes parted for it and Ngasik saw his watchdog pacing back and forth outside. He dropped the idea of running for now. He started mulling over what the bird had said about not using fire "any more," but then he was startled by a third tsapeli voice behind him.

He whirled and stared. A tsapeli with a familiar white crescent on his face stood in front of the niche in the wall, chattering away with the others. His fur was wet, but he looked unscarred and in robust health. Ngasik recognized dizzily that his idea of what went on in that sack was in for some drastic revision.

The three tsapeli stood talking incomprehensibly, with frequent obvious allusions to Ngasik, for some minutes. Meanwhile another came in the front door and offered Ngasik a tray of uncooked local food. Ngasik looked at it with a mixture of disgust and hunger, noticed that this was the same tsapeli who had introduced him to the leech and the watchdog, and decided not to eat. He had found a potable spring in a corner, which the watchdog was willing to share with him, and for a while that would be enough.

The one with the food put the tray down but stayed where he was. He said something to the others and they came over to join him. The wet one with the crescent stepped forward and scrutinized Ngasik with the aid of his eyelights. When he finished, he looked into Ngasik's face, his eyes still glowing dull green, and demanded —through the bird—"Where did you creatures come from?"

Ngasik resented being called a creature by this creature, but nevertheless started trying to phrase an answer that would convey a modicum of truth to these primitives. "You've seen the stars in the sky?"

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he began. "Each of them is a giant ball of fire, very far away. Around many of them revolve worlds, like yours. My people come from such a world, so far away it takes light almost seventy years to get here from there—"

"O.K., O.K.!" the crescent-faced tsapeli interrupted. "Another planet of another star. Why not just say so? You've got it backwards, anyway—the stars go around the planets. Anway *ours* does."

"How do you know that?" Ngasik asked.

The tsapeli jabbered among themselves. Finally one of them announced authoritatively, "It is taught by our philosophers. As for planets associated with other stars, we're not sure there are such things. Yet I suppose it is reasonable that if our sun goes around a planet, others could, too. Although they would have to be exceedingly far away, since we can't see such motion . . ."

"I said ours was seventy light-years away. That's pretty far."

"That's confusing, too. How can light take time to go anywhere? Vision is instantaneous. Anyway, suppose we buy your story. Then how did you get here?"

Ngasik groaned. How could he possibly hope to explain spacewarp to beings with no technology at all —beings who thought light traveled instantaneously? He could remember the concise rote definitions given to young Reska during dlazöl, but even they would help little. Some of the words probably were not even translatable. But it was all he could do.

"Our ships," he began, "bend space around themselves to provide more convenient geodesics . . ."

Mild furore broke out among the tsapeli. As Ngasik had expected, not much was getting through. The remainder of the night's interrogation was a spectacular exercise in futility, one big conversational impasse with only a few welcome leaks. But though little was accomplished, it went on until a couple of hours before dawn.

When the tsapeli finally left, and the watchdog came back in, Ngasik fought down his desire for sleep. Now was his chance to talk to the "parrot." He moved close to its perch and whispered, "Are you a prisoner of theirs, too?"

But the bird just spouted a tsapeli sentence of the same length and waited for a reply, though no tsapeli was present. Ngasik gave up and went to sleep, despite the renewed howling outside.

The parrot understood nothing. All it could do was translate.

Ngasik's morning call came later than expected. Kirlatsu, agitated by the events of yesterday and this morning, was tremendously relieved when he finally heard it. He listened with disappointment as Ngasik told how his fire trick had flopped, but he hardly heard the details. He was

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too brimming with his own startling news. As soon as he felt an opening in the conversation, he burst out, "Ngasik, there *is* intelligent life on the planet!"

"Oh, really?" Ngasik said calmly. "Do tell."

Kirlatsu did. "Yesterday morning we found some new things growing on the ground, mushroom-shaped with flat tops that turn out to be loudspeakers. They started talking to us!"

"Hm-m-m? What did they say?"

"You certainly are taking this calmly," Kirlatsu observed.

"Sorry. Afraid I'm getting blasé in my old age. Well, what did the mushrooms have to say for themselves?"

"A lot of it was gibberish at first, but it improved. When we got over the first shock and started answering them, they seemed to learn from what we said and changed their approach accordingly. The slant, that is, the way they presented it. As for the content, they seemed to know what they wanted to say and they weren't going to be swayed from it. The gist of it was that we don't belong here and we'd better get off the continent or something terrible will happen to us."

"Like what?"

"They're very vague on that. They also had the cheery news that if we do leave this continent and go to another one we'll probably run into the same kind of threats, but that's our problem. Then this morning they changed their tune. Instead of the *continent,* now they want us to get off the *planet*. They demand an immediate promise to that effect, and convincing evidence that we're starting to carry it out."

"Aha!" Ngasik said suddenly. "I'm beinning to see the light, I think."

"Huh?"

"Wait. You finish your story first. What was Tsardong-li's reaction?"

"He said he wasn't going to be bullied by a toadstool, and stubbed his toe kicking the nearest one. What did you mean by 'aha'?"

"I think I'm starting to see connections. You say they switched from 'continent' to 'planet' this morning. Well, last night I was talking to some of the tsapeli through a bird they have that can translate between tsapeli and Resorka. The one that was so demolished in the fight—he came out of that bag of worms healed instead of eaten—asked me where we came from. They had a little trouble swallowing the idea that we were from a planet of a distant star, but I think they finally did. And this morning your mushrooms are talking planets instead of continents. Sounds suspiciously like your mushrooms are just propagandists planted there by the tsapeli and kept up to date by them."

"That's a bit much. Still, how did *any* of them learn our language? And can they do anything more than threaten?"

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"I don't know. As for the language, they must have had spies. The mimic-beetles, maybe? I just know I'm starting to think there's more here than meets the eye."

"So is Dzukarl. He's about ready to order the sirla off the planet, but Tsardong-li's standing pat on the letter of the law—which, as he points out, makes no provision for gabby mushrooms. But Dzukarl's getting plenty nervous. Since your fire didn't faze them, are you ready to have us try to rescue you?"

Ngasik hesitated briefly before answering, "No, I still think it's too risky. I don't have any more ideas to try just now, and I'd sure like to get out of here—the eyestrain's something fierce. But unless you have something real clever and foolproof all worked out, I think I'm safer biding my time than trying anything rash."

When Ngasik's inquisitors—the Leechkeeper and Crescentface—returned at dusk, they seemed to exude exasperation. Crescentface opened the conversation with, "Why haven't your people responded to our ultimatum?"

Thereby pretty well confirming Ngasik's suspicion about the mushrooms. The tsapeli were the free agents here—probably the *only* free agents. Deal successfully with them and problems like birds and mushrooms would be solved in the bargain.

Ngasik laughed humorlessly. "I can hardly say, seeing how much contact with them you've allowed me. But one reason might be that you haven't given them any *reason* why they should leave."

"But they *must!*" the Leechkeeper said emphatically. Ngasik noted with mild surprise that they didn't seem to think it odd that he knew what the ultimatum was. "Can't they see that? Before they . . . you . . . came, everything was normal. All nature was in harmony. Your coming introduced a clashing note. You brought discord and destruction. If you stay it will just get worse. Everything will . . . collapse—" His voice drifted off and his tail twitched nervously. Ngasik could see that he realized he was not making himself clear.

Ngasik could sympathize somewhat with that frustration, but that didn't change the fact that the Leechkeeper's plea sounded like nothing more than superstitious fear of the vaguest kind. There was nothing in it substantial enough for Ngasik to seize on and try to clarify. He said, "I'm sorry. But I could never persuade them to leave on the basis of that. Tsardong-li is a hard-boiled egg. He'd have to have neat, specific, compelling reasons, succinctly phrased and preferably expressed in cash terms to the nearest decimal."

"There *are* compelling reasons!" the Leechkeeper insisted. "I just don't know how to explain them to you. I don't think the translator

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is equipped—" He gave up. Ngasik recalled his own attempts to tell where he had come from, and how, and for a moment he felt sure he understood the Leechkeeper's feeling. Perhaps there really were reasons why the Reska produced far-reaching disturbances here. Perhaps even Tsardong-li could be moved by them—if he could be told, to his satisfaction, what they were. But if he couldn't, there was no chance.

All Ngasik could do was to repeat, "I'm sorry. Maybe the danger isn't as great as you think. Surely we can't be *that* terrible a threat to you. We haven't even—"

Suddenly—to the momentary confusion of the translator-parrot—Crescentface interrupted with a fierce stamp of his foot and lashing of his tail. "The danger is real," he said hotly, "and we haven't overestimated it. If we can't make you understand it, that's too bad. We meant you no harm and we hoped to avoid it, but we have no choice left. We don't make threats we can't follow up. Our warnings were simple statements of fact." Then he switched to his own language, untranslated, for five seconds, and stamped angrily out, emitting a series of siren screams as he passed through the door.

Ngasik was left alone with the Leechkeeper, hopelessly confused and for the first time actually fearful of what was happening. He asked the Leechkeeper, "What's the matter with him? Where's he going?"

The Leechkeeper said only, "They were warned. You can't expect us to sit idle and watch our way of life be destroyed."

An unprecedentedly chilling chorus of howls had already started outside, some of them just outside the door. Ngasik still didn't know what kind of animals produced the howls, though he had heard them often and had seen many animals, but suddenly he was practically positive they were instruments of long-distance communication for the tsapeli. Something was being plotted out there. Under the howls, briefly, he faintly heard a buzzing of wings, far smaller and faster than the razor-beaked birds that had attacked the Reska the night he was captured.

He protested, "But nobody's trying to destroy your way of life! Listen—"

The Leechkeeper interrupted dully, "Whether you kill us maliciously or accidentally, we're just as dead."

Ngasik tried to explain that there was no reason to believe any such thing was going to happen. Privately, he wasn't so sure. Even as he talked, he remembered his pavement-encrusted home planet and how different it was now from the wilderness most of it had been a few centuries earlier. He himself had chosen space and wild planets

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in preference to the noise and pollution that came with the comforts of home. It could happen here, too —not overnight, of course.

Just minutes later, he was interrupted by the sound of huge wings outside. The Leechkeeper said, "Come with me," and went through the door with the parrot still on his shoulder. Ngasik hesitated a moment and then followed. He really had no more than a fleeting illusion of a choice.

The Leechkeeper led him a few dozen feet to a clearing tightly hemmed in by trees. The full moon hanging above the clearing showed an enormous "bird" on the ground, wings partly spread and filling a great deal of the clearing. The bird was leaning awkwardly forward, and Crescentface was climbing into a deep pouch just below its throat. The Leechkeeper indicated that Ngasik should climb in next to him. Ngasik hesitated, but only until Crescentface gave a siren burst and the watchdog came charging from among the trees. Finally the Leechkeeper climbed in and slipped something in the parrot's mouth.

Ngasik, trying to get used to the excessive warmth and snug fit of the pouch, which came up to his chin when he stood full-length in it, asked his tsapeli escorts, "Where are we going?"

Crescentface said, "To the capital."

"Capital?" Ngasik echoed sharply. "Of what?"

"The continent." And then the parrot went limp. The Leechkeeper tucked it down inside the pouch and shouted something. The big bird leaned back, raising its passengers several feet, and started flapping its expansive wings. All three passengers stood with their heads above the pouch, watching the moonlit clearing fall below. Then they hung between the stars and the dark trees, rapidly gaining speed and altitude.

Ngasik, for the first time really shocked by events, took out his radio and tried frantically to get a call through to Kirlatsu. The tsapeli were watching, of course, but at least they couldn't understand what he said with the parrot drugged. He wanted somebody of the sirla to know what was happening.

But no answer came.

Kirlatsu heard, but was quite unable to answer. The disease which had started raging through the Reska camp only minutes earlier, striking with terrifying suddenness and simultaneity, had just got to him. He was in the initial stage of severe nausea and violent muscle spasms, and had no idea how he would be in ten minutes. Some were already dead; others were still passing through a varied succession of agonizing symptoms. A few seemed to be making a partial recovery already, and still fewer, immune or at least delayed in their reaction, had not yet been struck.

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And Ngasik's fading voice from Kirlatsu's radio was saying, "They *were* behind the mushrooms' threats, and they insist they weren't kidding. Don't know what they mean, but you'd better watch out . . ."

Thanks for the advice, Kirlatsu thought wryly. Gradually he began to feel better, passing into a phase characterized by great, but finite, weakness and misery. But by the time he was able to reach and use his radio, Ngasik was out of range.

There was no point in even attempting a reply now. Later—if he lived long enough—Kirlatsu could build a new transmitter powerful enough to reach Ngasik's handset, and a receiver capable of picking Ngasik's weak signal out of overwhelming noise. The techniques were routine but would take time, and Kirlatsu was in no condition to even start them now.

Instead he called Dzukarl, aboard the *Tsulan*, and gasped out the essentials of what had happened to Ngasik. He finished with a personal comment. "I'm afraid you were right They are dangerous. We should have listened to their . . ." He heard motions inside the ship that sounded like somebody getting ready to come out. "Don't come out!" he warned quickly. "There's . . . sickness out here. Or do you have it on the ship, too?"

"None that I know," Dzukarl said.

Kirlatsu started to feel a new pounding sensation in his eyes and ears. "It struck suddenly," he explained. "Just a few minutes ago. It sounds silly, but . . . Ngasik said the tsapeli were repeating their threats just before it happened." The pain was getting worse. Kirlatsu just hoped this would pass like the first painful phase. He added, "Some of us are dead already. Keep the ship sealed."

Dzukarl snapped, "Is Tsardong-li alive?" Kirlatsu strained to see. The boss had fallen just a few yards away, but Kirlatsu couldn't tell whether he was alive or not. Dzukarl repeated his question more loudly.

Kirlatsu said weakly, "I don't know." Then he saw Tsardong-li's arm creeping out toward his own radio, reaching it, snapping it on, then lying exhausted from the effort.

"Yes," Tsardong-li said, just loud enough for his radio to hear.

"Listen," the Arbiter said, "I'm telling you once more: take your sirla off this planet before it's too late. We'll bring you aboard and take you home in quarantine under expert medical care."

Tsardong-li found strength to snarl, "No! I'm not going to be beat that easily. I have my own medics." (*If any of them are still alive*, Kirlatsu thought sourly.) "And I'm still not convinced that anything here comes under your jurisdiction."

Dzukarl muttered something un-

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der his breath. "If it doesn't," he said aloud, "it's high time it did. Whether the tsapeli are a legally civilized race or not, messing with them is like playing with fire. Tsardong-li, you're about to become a precedent. Stay if you insist. I'm rushing a full report on the situation here back to Reslaka. When I come back, I'll have a warrant to take everybody who's still alive off here. You won't gain anything except a few more weeks of this and making me waste some fuel."

He broke contact. A mushroom midway between Kirlatsu and Tsardong-li asked, "Do I understand correctly that one group of you is leaving as requested—but plans to return?"

Kirlatsu, annoyed and disgusted, grunted. Had he been in more articulate shape, the grunt would have been a select morsel of Resorka profanity, but the mushroom took it for assent. It said, "I wouldn't advise that."

That was all Kirlatsu heard, for already the *Tsulan* was readying its engines. Moments later it flashed away into the night sky.

The big bird flew for hours, and for all Ngasik knew, it might have covered hundreds of miles. In its initial climb it rapidly reached such a speed that the passengers could no longer stand the wind in their faces and took refuge completely inside the pouch. Judging from feel, the bird must have early climbed into a fast stream and just ridden it without exertion for most of the trip. Then the wind on an exposed face might not have been too severe, but the temperature would have been. There was enough heat loss through the outer wall at those altitudes to make Ngasik begin to appreciate the bird's body heat.

Finally he felt a strong sensation of descent and deceleration. The tsapeli at his sides stood up and stuck their heads out the top of the pouch. Ngasik followed suit. The wind that hit his face was cold and strong, but a welcome relief after being cramped in the dark warmth of the passenger pouch for so long.

The sky was already beginning to redden with approaching dawn, and visibility was far better for diurnal eyes than when they took off. The Leechkeeper pointed with apparent pride to a region off to the right, making noises which did Ngasik little good without the parrot's help. But he did gather that that area was the "capital."

It was a plateau rimmed by steep slopes. Gray morning mists swirled skyward from a lake sunk in the middle of it. From the air, the forests which covered it looked indistinguishable from those around the sirla encampment. On the ground, after the big bird landed in a small clearing near the lake, Ngasik recognized minor differences in vegetation, but only minor ones. The "capital" was just virtually unbrok-

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en forest like all the other temperate parts of the planet.

The tsapeli led Ngasik past two of the fungoid "houses" and stopped at the third one. The interior was a single room, smaller than his previous prison, and with no extra doors or furniture other than a familiar luminous watchdog. The tsapeli indicated that he was to stay and then left, hurrying to their lodgings before full daylight.

Ngasik, tired after the long, uncomfortable flight on an empty stomach, fell asleep almost immediately. He woke several times during the day and tried the radio, but always without success.

Night, of course, brought visitors. Crescentface and the Leechkeeper, with the parrot on his shoulder, entered first, followed by a large stranger with more of an easygoing air than any of the other tsapeli Ngasik had met. The stranger carried a closed container, evidently carved from some fruit, under one arm. A strip of skin shaved bare above his upper lip created an effect that struck Ngasik as whimsically comical.

Crescentface gestured elaborately toward the stranger and introduced him. The parrot translated everything except the unpronounceable name, which had some resemblance to an improbable consonant cluster: "His Honor, Bdwdlsplg, First Person of the National Assembly of Sorcerers."

Bdwdlsplg wrinkled his upper lip in a way that Ngasik interpreted as a smile of sorts. "I'm afraid the bird didn't render my title very well," he apologized. "I gather it isn't really very translatable. Fortunately it's not really very important, either. My pleasure to meet you." He uncovered the container he carried and held it out to Ngasik. "You must be hungry. You'll find this nutritious and, I hope, palatable."

This time Ngasik took the food —not because he was put at ease by Bdwdlsplg's relative suavity, but simply because he had decided that for some reason the tsapeli considered him rather special. Maybe it was nothing more than the fact that he was the one bird in the hand supposed to be worth several elsewhere. Whatever the cause, they seemed unlikely to murder him—yet, anyway. His decision was also influenced, of course, by a hunger that had become overpowering.

The container held some fruit and a few small animals, none of them cooked. Yet some of them tasted remarkably as if they *had* been cooked. There were also a couple of smaller containers, one containing a thin liquid and the other a sort of pudding. Ngasik was about to try the pudding when he noticed several of the little white arthropods he had seen in clearings lodged in its surface.

Bdwdlsplg saw him staring at them and explained, "They make

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the pudding for us. It's our main staple crop, and the bug colonies plant it, take care of it, and harvest it, thereby saving us all that trouble. They convert it to this form, and all we have to do is gather it from their hives. Very satisfying form of agriculture. Naturally the pudding always has a few of the bugs scattered through it, so rather than pick them out we just bred them for flavor."

Ngasik nodded numbly and tasted it. Actually, it wasn't bad. His upbringing included a mild prejudice against bugs in his food, but several days of fasting made that easy to overcome. He settled down to eating Bdwdlsplg's gifts without complaint.

"Now," said Bdwdlsplg, "to business. We're going to be asking you a good many questions. Before we start, do you have any you'd like to ask us? We'll be glad to answer—within reason."

"Yes," Ngasik responded immediately and with renewed irritation. "What happened to my shipmates? And don't tell me nothing did. I have my own . . . er . . . *magical* . . . ways of knowing that something did."

Bdwdlsplg wrinkled his lips again and made some noises that might have been laughter. "Your magic isn't as impressive as you might think. I'll admit we don't understand all the details, any more than you understand everything you've seen here. But it's pretty obvious that your technology is built on applying the fundamental principles of nature—the ones you shouldn't even have to understand—from scratch. Trying to imitate in a few years what nature has developed over millions, instead of just learning to use it and build on it. What a colossally obtuse way to try to build a civilization—when evolution has already done most of the work for you, and better than you'll ever do it yourself!"

Hold on! Ngasik thought. *Who's looking down on whose civilization? You're the savages here . . . aren't you?* He said coldly, "It's served us well. What about my shipmates—or don't you want to answer?"

"Oh, I'll answer. Are you through eating? Your friends, I regret, have contracted a particularly virulent disease, custom tailored for them. You contributed, by the way—the fluid sample Syglgdm took from you showed us what was needed."

Ngasik remembered the leech, but found the possibility of doing such a thing—and the implications of what else the tsapeli could do—a bit much to assimilate all at once. For now he accepted it and asked, "Why?"

"A last resort. They were offered a chance to leave unharmed. It was necessary for them to leave because they were disrupting the local life patterns."

"How? Mining a few minerals,

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harvesting a few plants? I can't believe that what little we took could have any large-scale, long-range harmful effects."

"The arrival of a second ship strongly suggested that things would get worse before they got better."

That Ngasik could not deny. "If you would confront us directly—*explain* the difficulty—maybe we could negotiate."

"There are no concessions for us to make. You don't understand the delicacy of the situation. The emergence of intelligence naturally tends to unbalance the—ecology. Do you have that word?" Bdwdlsplg had hesitated to use it, but it came through translation all right. Ngasik nodded, and Bdwdlsplg went on, "Presumably your odd devices did; certainly our tailored life forms did. Restoring and maintaining a viable balance was a hard-earned accomplishment. The new balance is so delicate, so precarious, that we have to be extremely careful about introducing new forms. The very presence of an unplanned alien element here, even quite a small one, could quite conceivably precipitate chaos.

"We realize that you probably *intend* no such thing, but you quite literally threaten our entire way of life. Therefore, we can't tolerate your presence. If you won't go willingly, and promptly, we're forced to take extreme measures. Exterminate those who are here, deter survivors who might want to come later. All without personal malice."

Part of Ngasik, even with his superficial acquaintance with ecology, could see their viewpoint. What they said might be literally true. But still, those were his shipmates, his sirla, being exterminated!

That issue was too big and confusing to grasp on the spur of the moment. He kept tossing it around mentally while a detached part of his mind asked numbly, "You say you don't even need to know the laws of physics and chemistry and—"

The translation evidently wasn't getting through. Bdwdlsplg interrupted. "I guess those are the ones. But we're just now beginning to see that maybe there are times when it would be nice to have them."

"But how—"

Bdwdlsplg held up one hand, palm forward, and wrinkled his shaved lip again. "It's my turn to ask questions now. You say you're from the stars . . ."

Dzukarl, under quarantine aboard the *Tsulan* and miserable enough just from his trembling weakness and horrible itching, winced at the scowl on Aingao's face on his phonescreen. Aingao, as Chairman of the Overgovernment of Reslaka, with jurisdiction transcending all sirla and geographic units, was not one to be offended lightly. He glared out of the screen at the Arbiter and demanded,

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"You're *sure* the ship was fully sealed?"

Dzukarl gulped. "Yes, sir. For several hours before the outbreak in the sirla camp. Since the onset was so sudden in the camp but seemed to miss us altogether, we assumed the disease-causing agent arrived suddenly and worked almost at once. Maybe we were wrong. I can hardly imagine the pathogen getting through the *Tsulan's* seals. But it obviously got aboard some time and struck while we were at space."

"Hm-m-m. I gather you haven't made much progress toward isolating the germ and finding a cure?"

"No, sir. One of our medical officers died almost immediately. The other seems to be immune and has been working very diligently to get a handle on the disease. As soon as we landed he had additional, highly sophisticated, instruments sent aboard through a sterilizing chamber to help him."

"What has he learned so far?"

Dzukarl lowered his eyes from the screen. "Er . . . very little, sir. Actually, there's no lead at all yet." He added hastily, "But I'm sure something will turn up. Meanwhile, there is a sirla in a very ticklish spot with more or less intelligent natives on a world they are trying to exploit. One man has been captured. And . . . er . . . there is a remote possibility that the plague is a biological weapon used by the natives."

"What?" Aingao almost shouted.

"I'm afraid you heard me, sir. I can hardly accept it myself, but the aborigines *were* making threats shortly before the plague struck, to the effect that something unpleasant would happen if the Reska didn't get off the planet forthwith."

Aingao frowned. "Aborigines talking about getting off planets? Forgive me, Dzukarl, but that hardly sounds consistent."

Dzukarl shook his head miserably. "I know it's confusing, sir. I'm confused myself. But let's figure it out later. Right now, I believe it's urgent that Sirla Tsardong be taken off that planet—and kept off. I tried to persuade Tsardong-li, but he refused. Said there was no developed race there so I had no basis for authority. Technically, he's right. But I think the case is special. I request a warrant giving me special authority to order removal."

Aingao chewed on his upper lip, pondering the request. Dzukarl elaborated on it: "Moreover, sir, I believe the probable urgency is extreme. Tunnel ships are too slow because of acceleration and deceleration time. And there will likely be considerable danger upon arrival. I would like to return by warp ship, and take a sizable armed division with me."

Aingao groaned. "I'm afraid I find your requests basically reasonable. But the *expense* of using a warp ship just for transport! And the *morality* of letting diseased men

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from the *Tsulan* travel with healthy soldiers . . . of sending healthy men to a plague world—"

He was interrupted by a sharp buzz in his own office. "Excuse me," he said. "Something urgent coming in." He leaned out of the field of view for several minutes, his voice becoming too low for Dzukarl to understand what he said. When he returned to Dzukarl's screen he was very pale. "Maybe it doesn't matter," he said weakly. "Your plague seems to be spreading like wildfire from your 'sealed' ship. Deaths have already been reported as much as forty miles from the spaceport. And you've been in port less than two hours!"

"Sir," Dzukarl said tightly, "I hate to mention it, but—"

Aingao nodded. "I know. In that time one ship has cleared here on an interplanetary run and another on an interstellar trade route. The interplanetary we can probably intercept, but the *interstellar* . . ." He stared blankly into space, shaking his head slowly.

There came a day when Ngasik found a signal on his radio, weak but intelligible. He listened intently, both relieved and concerned, as Kirlatsu explained, "I've built some new equipment so we could talk to you. I would have done it sooner, but I've been sick. Most of us have been sick. We had hoped to find where you were and plot a safe way to rescue you, but I'm afraid that's impossible now. There aren't enough of us left alive and well."

Ngasik felt spiritual sickness as he visualized his sirla decimated by plague, but physically he was still in good shape. Bdwdlsplg had even provided him with a diurnal watchdog so he could get some exercise in sunlight. He told Kirlatsu, "The plague is artificial. The tsapeli took a fluid sample from me and used it to *invent* a plague to exterminate the Reska. Probably some of us are immune—I haven't got it yet." (He realized abruptly that that was odd—the disease was based on *his* body fluids, and yet *he* seemed immune. Had they done something else to prevent his getting it?) "It might be a good idea for the survivors there to seal themselves in the ship. They may be after you shortly with a new strain designed to catch those who resisted the first batch. They're very anxious to eradicate us."

"They may not have to bother," Kirlatsu said bitterly. "This one's still spreading, finally attacking individuals we thought were immune."

So maybe my time will *come,* Ngasik thought.

Kirlatsu had paused, but Ngasik said nothing. After a while Kirlatsu said pensively, "So the tsapeli caused this! They must know how to cure it, too—but they'd rather just watch us suffer and die. Ngasik . . . why are they doing this to us?"

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"It's hard to explain," Ngasik said slowly. "To really understand it—to be sure whether it makes sense even from their standpoint—I'd have to know more about ecology than the little I remember from my dlazöl.

"It turns out that our 'obvious savages', ironically, have almost a pure technocracy organized on a continent-wide basis. Their technology is entirely biological, but very advanced. The new life forms they create—and they can make them to order overnight—make it necessary to control the ecology very closely. Their entire culture depends on keeping that running smoothly. It has to be handled by people who understand it, so the modern descendants of the 'sorcerer' class who learned the tricks of manipulating life control the main branch of their government. The government has to be continent-wide because ecological interactions interlock strongly over an entire land mass.

"They claim that our coming here upsets things enough so the whole system could collapse—so they want to get rid of us, by foul means if not fair." He added wryly, "And they have the gall to hint they'd like to know our secrets of interstellar flight!"

Kirlatsu, his radio voice crackly even with the new long-distance equipment, asked, "How about the folks back home? Did the *Tsulan* take the plague there?"

Ngasik shut his eyes. "I don't know," he said. "I'm not sure how easy or hard that would be. But the tsapeli have hinted that they wouldn't mind exterminating the Reska altogether—to be very sure we give them no more trouble."

Kirlatsu said nothing, but Ngasik heard his slow, heavy breathing and knew nothing more to say to him. He broke contact.

As he tried to get back to sleep, an idea began to form in his mind—and then a decision.

Thirteen of the original hundred Reska were still alive in the sirla camp when the warp ship landed. Kirlatsu looked at it, puzzled, as it settled down, nearly filling the clearing, and became silent. He had figured the *Tsulan* might return eventually—though by the time it could get back there might be nobody alive to meet it—but certainly not this soon. And a warp ship was a surprise in any case.

He watched to see who would come out of it. In a few minutes Dzukarl emerged and walked slowly toward the camp, carrying a key to let him inside the dome. As he came close, Kirlatsu saw with a sinking sensation that he was thin and covered with the white spots that came in a late stage of the plague.

Dzukarl stopped near Kirlatsu and said, "I want to talk to Tsardong-li." His voice was weak, but had the old air of authority.

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Kirlatsu said, "Tsardong-li is dead."

"I'm sorry." Brief pause. "I bring orders to remove Sirla Tsardong from Slepo IV. If possible, I am to attempt also to rescue the man who was taken prisoner. We are prepared to fight the tsapeli—"

"Don't you know when you're licked?" Kirlatsu interrupted bitterly. "Oh, we'll be glad to go back with you. All thirteen—" Then he was interrupted by the long-distance radio.

"What's going on?" Ngasik demanded anxiously. His voice was distorted by the noise filters, but Kirlatsu had little trouble understanding it. "I thought I heard a ship going over a little while ago. Is somebody—"

"This is Dzukarl," the Arbiter broke in. "I came back with a warp ship to take you all off the planet. Can you tell me where to bring a rescue party?"

"No," Ngasik answered promptly. "And you can't afford to try to find me. You went back to Reslaka. Did the plague—"

"Yes." Dzukarl nodded glumly. "It's spreading wildly over Reslaka —and the colonies, carried by ships which left port before we knew the *Tsulan* was contagious. I would never have believed a disease could spread so fast—and work so fast. I'm half afraid it could wipe us out before we find a cure."

"It could," Ngasik said bluntly. "That's what it's supposed to do."

Kirlatsu saw Dzukarl turn pale. The Arbiter said weakly, "What?"

"The tsapeli developed the plague to exterminate the Reska. Naturally they would want to make it fast-working. Otherwise we might be able to discover a cure before it had finished its job."

Dzukarl said fiercely, "O.K., they may wipe us out, but at least we can take them with us! I brought along weapons and troops. A lot of them are sick, but not too sick to go down fighting!"

"Where's the point in that?" Ngasik asked very quietly. It suddenly seemed to Kirlatsu, somehow, that the quiet in his friend's voice now was more suggestive of new-found strength than of defeat. "Suppose you bomb the whole planet—which you probably aren't equipped to do anyway. You destroy all the tsapeli. But that doesn't save the Reska—*because only the tsapeli know how to cure the plague!*

"Face it, Dzukarl—the chance of our medics finding a cure in time to stop something that works that fast is infinitesimal. If you exterminate the tsapeli, you may soothe your sense of honor—but you practically *guarantee* our extinction."

"Does it really matter?" Dzukarl asked. "Aren't we doomed either way?"

"No!" Ngasik practically shouted. "I've been living among the tsapeli, starting to learn about them. I know what their reason for doing this is. All they really want

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is to keep Reska off this planet—for reasons which make sense to them. Their purpose will be served if the Reska just leave and never come back. It doesn't really matter if you go away cured, just so you go away. If you come back, you can be hit with a fresh plague."

"You mean," Dzukarl asked, confused, "they're *willing* to just *give* us the cure?"

"Of course not. We've made them angry and distrustful. But there is something we have and they want. They want it badly enough to risk giving you the cure in return for it. I've made a deal with them."

"You've *what*?"

"They want to know how to build starships—and they claim they can work *one* alien into their ecology, under close supervision. I've agreed to stay and teach them." There was a numb silence at Kirlatsu's end of the line. Ngasik added, "I warned them there's a lot to learn, and it will take a long time. After all, they're starting from nothing."

"But," Dzukarl spluttered, "but . . . but, that's *treason*!"

"No!" Kirlatsu shouted, suddenly understanding. "No, it isn't, really. And under the circumstances, I can't see that we have any choice—except nonsurvival."

"Neither can I," Ngasik said. "The cure will work much as the disease. Your camp and ships will be 'infected', and the effects should start showing up very shortly. Then you leave, fast, to show good faith. When you go home, the cure will spread just as the disease did. If they don't keep their word—if any trickery shows up—I've made it clear to the tsapeli that you can get word to me without even entering the atmosphere here. In which case I've promised to kill myself, which they emphatically don't want. Otherwise, surviving Reska can be cured and stay far away from Slepo."

Kirlatsu was full of an odd mixture of hope, relief, and gratitude—and concern. "But, Ngasik," he said, "have you thought of what you're letting yourself in for? The danger, the loneliness—"

"I'll manage," Ngasik assured him, sounding almost cheerful. "I'll keep alive; I may even find small pleasures in learning what makes these characters tick. In any case, if I can save a few billion lives it's worth it. Good-bye, Kirlatsu."

"Good-bye, Ngasik." Kirlatsu broke contact and went straight to his hut. Dzukarl was still confused, but he could wait a while for an explanation. Right now Kirlatsu wanted to start remembering what it felt like to have a future.

"They kept their part of the bargain," Kirlatsu finished, "and we checked the plague before it wiped us out—but not before it killed forty-one percent of the race. With damage so great and widespread,

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the Overgovernment of Reslaka decided—virtually without opposition—that extreme precautions were necessary in the future."

"To prevent more trouble with the plague?" Carla asked. "Or the tsapeli?" She shuddered, remembering some of the gorier details of Kirlatsu's story.

Kirlatsu shook his head. "No. That was the least of our worries. Slepo IV was put strictly off limits, of course. The radical precautions were just those laws you were wondering about—to guard against trouble with races not yet imagined. You see, the really deadly thing about the tsapeli wasn't that they could start plagues."

"It wasn't?"

"No. If we'd known *they had a highly technical culture, we wouldn't have tangled with them. If we had, Dzukarl could have forced us off even under the puny laws we had then. What we learned from the tsapeli—and it came as a terrible shock to all of us—was that a highly developed and dangerous culture might be very far from obvious . . . until it's too late. We were most anxious to see that we never fell into that trap again."*

Carla suddenly seemed to understand. She murmured an apology to Kirlatsu for what she had said earlier. And I thought of something Kirlatsu had not cleared up.

"But were you really out of this *trap?" I asked. "Weren't you—*aren't *you—afraid of what the tsapeli will do when Ngasik teaches them, and they come into space after you?"*

Kirlatsu smiled slyly. "Not terribly," he said. "You see, Ngasik was just a cook—with a gift of gab." ■

THE ANALYTICAL LABORATORY/APRIL 1969

PLACE	TITLE	AUTHOR	POINTS
1.	Opportunist	*Guy McCord*	1.6
2.	The Five Way Secret Agent (Part One)	*Mack Reynolds*	2.02
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THE EDITOR

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Morton Hommel, Ph.D., director of the Banner Value Drug & Vitamin Laboratories, Inc., proudly put the bottle of yellow capsules on the desk of old Sam Banner, president of the company.

Banner glanced at them dubiously.

"What are they good for, Mort?"

Hommel said, with quiet pride, "They increase intelligence."

Banner looked up.

"What's that again?"

"The drug stimulates intellectual activity. It channels energy from gross physical pursuits into imaginative creativity."

Banner looked at him alertly.

"Have you been taking it?"

"No. But we've carried out exhaustive—"

"It *works?*"

"It's extremely effective."

Banner sat back, and studied the capsules.

"Well, a thing like this would sell to students. Lawyers would want it. Doctors, engineers— Just about everybody could use more brains these days. Quite a market." Then he shook his head. "But it might be that what we've got here is a catastrophe in a bottle. How did we get into this, anyway? I don't remember any work on brain pills."

Hommel winced. "We prefer to think of it as a *drug mediating the enhancement of intellectual activity.*"

"That's what I say. Brain pills. How did we get into this in the first place?"

"Well, you remember that problem of parapl—"

"Put it into words an ordinary human can follow, Mort."

Hommel's face took on the expression of a truck driver faced with a detour off a six-lane highway onto a mountain road. With a visi-

the great intellect boom

That intellectual achievement is one of the greatest strengths of Civilization. But . . . maybe Civilization could become muscle-bound?

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

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ble effort, he said, "I mean, that problem of broken nerve tracts that wouldn't grow together."

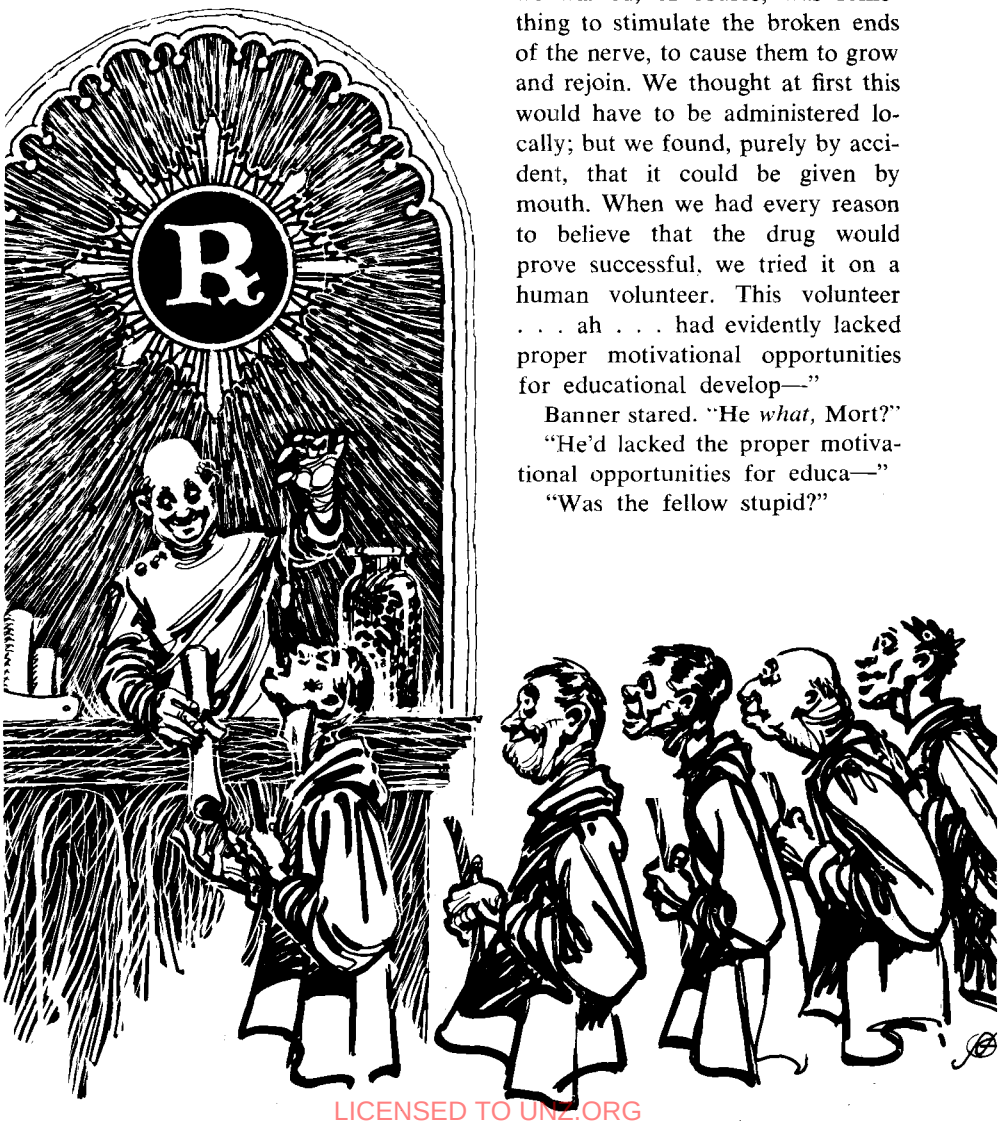
"I remember *that*. So what?"

"We thought we had a promising lead. It had seemed satisfactory with experimental animals. What we wanted, of course, was something to stimulate the broken ends of the nerve, to cause them to grow and rejoin. We thought at first this would have to be administered locally; but we found, purely by accident, that it could be given by mouth. When we had every reason to believe that the drug would prove successful, we tried it on a human volunteer. This volunteer . . . ah . . . had evidently lacked proper motivational opportunities for educational develop—"

Banner stared. "He *what*, Mort?"

"He'd lacked the proper motivational opportunities for educa—"

"Was the fellow stupid?"



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"Well, I'd hesitate to say he—"

"Mort," said Banner, "a junkyard is a junkyard—whether you decide to call it a junkyard or a 'storage module for preprocessed metals.' Was the fellow stupid, or wasn't he?"

Hommel blew out his breath.

"He wasn't the brightest person I ever met."

"All right. What happened?"

"He'd been badly injured. Yet it certainly seemed, from our previous work, that the drug ought to produce a cure. But it didn't."

"The broken ends of the nerves didn't grow together?"

"No."

Banner nodded sympathetically.

"What then?"

"Well, we were very much disappointed. But we were also surprised, because the patient suddenly seemed to gain insight into his accident. Prior to this time, he'd simply blamed the other drivers."

"How did he get hurt?"

"He was driving in heavy traffic, got on the wrong turnoff, and tried to get back by making a quick U-turn in a cloverleaf intersection."

Banner looked blank.

Hommel said, "Not only that, but he was convinced that the other drivers owed him a lifetime pension. After he'd been treated with our drug, he saw there was another side to the question."

Banner glanced thoughtfully at the capsules. "Maybe we have something here, after all. What happened next?"

"Well, at first we didn't realize what had happened. But we continued treatment, still hoping for a cure. The patient enrolled in a correspondence course and completed his high-school education. Meanwhile, we'd started treatment on another patient, who read comic books at the beginning of the treatment, and was studying medieval history at the end. It began to dawn on us that there might be some connection. After that, we carried out thorough investigations, and found that there is invariably a marked increase in the patient's intellectual activity. It's no longer possible to think of this as a coincience. The increase in intellectual activity is caused by our drug."

"Any side effects?"

"In some few patients there's a rash. Occasionally, there's a complaint of a temporary numbness—a sense of being removed from reality. The rash subsides in a day or two after discontinuance of treatment. The numbness fades away in a few hours. Neither reaction seems serious, and neither is especially common."

"How about this increased intelligence? Does it fade away when the patient stops taking the pills?"

"There's a drop, but there's also a residual increase that remains. One of the men on the hospital staff compared intelligence with the amount of traffic a road network

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will bear. The 'mental traffic' will depend on the mental 'road system' —the number and condition of the brain's nerve cells and connections. The drug speeds up mental 'road building.' When the drug is discontinued, this 'road building' drops back to a much lower level. Those 'roads' only partly finished quickly become unusable. But those already finished remain in use, allowing an increase in 'traffic'—intelligence—over what there was to begin with, although lower than at the peak."

"How much of an increase can there be? What's the limit?"

"We don't know. But it can be substantial, from what we've seen. And happily this all fits right in with the current recognition of the importance of education. Quite a few of our patients have gone back to school or college, where they're all doing well. This drug fits in perfectly with the needs of the day."

Banner shook his head.

"It *sounds* good, Mort. And *maybe* it is. But we want to take a few precautions, just in case. Keep working to see if there are any side effects we don't know about, especially any that build up slowly. And start work on an antidote."

Hommel looked dumbfounded.

"But—an *antidote* to this would be a *stupidity drug.*"

"It might be, and it might not. Who knows how it would work? But we'd better find one." Banner smiled suddenly. "By the way, Mort, have you thought what to name this? How about 'Super Mentalline'?"

"Surely we ought to take a more conservative approach."

"With this," said Banner, "that may prove harder than it looks. But we'll see what we can do."

The drug, when it appeared, was modestly advertised. And Hommel thought the label on the bottle *too* restrained:

CEREBROCREATINE

A Mental Stimulant

Take one to two capsules daily as required, for mild stimulation of intellectual activity. Especially recommended for students, teachers, and others engaged in pursuits requiring increased mental activity.

Caution: Some individuals may be allergic to these capsules. Appearance of a rash, or a temporary feeling of numbness, should cause reduction of dosage or discontinuance of use.

Sales got off to a sluggish start, and remained dull until a sensational Sunday supplement article appeared, titled: "Breakthrough in Brains—New Drug Dramatically Boosts I.Q.!"

That got the ball rolling. Soon, brief "special reports" on radio added to the attention. Television news announcers began introducing humorous items on "I.Q. Capsules," for light relief from a steady diet of disasters.

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Sales started to pick up.

Students with half a semester's work to do the night before the exam instantly recognized the possibilities. The results were so delightful that the news spread fast.

Sales of Cerebrocreatine began doubling from week to week.

Banner found himself reading with close attention a letter that gave an idea what was going on:

Dear Sir:

I am writing to thank you for your help in passing German I. The night before the midyear exam, I could scarcely tell the difference between "f" and "s" in that weird type they use in our reader. But I ate up about half a bottle of your I.Q. pills, holed up with the text and the reader, and by the time Old Sol crawled up over the treetops next morning, I was a new man, *Ja wohl!*

I'm pretty well covered with red spots right now, and for a while there I kind of felt like I was packed in ice, but I got past the midyear's exam, and it was worth it!

This German, by the way, is interesting, once you get into it.

Yours in *Gemutlichkeit,*

Banner read this letter over and over again, then called Hommel in to find out how work was coming on the antidote.

Hommel was cheerful.

"We've had some brilliant suggestions, and some really stimulating discussions on the subject, and that sort of beginning can lay the groundwork for some genuine high-order achievement later on. I'm sure we'll have real progress to report before long, considering the caliber of the thought that's been shown recently."

Banner frowned.

"That's nice, Mort. But what's been *done* so far?"

"Well, as you realize, this is an extremely difficult problem to deal with. There are a great many ramifications, of really extraordinary subtlety. To put it in layman's language, it pays to clear away the undergrowth before plunging into the thicket."

Banner looked at Hommel attentively, then held out the letter.

"Take a look at this, Mort."

Hommel read the letter quickly, with a faint air of negligent disinterest.

"I'm sorry we didn't have this when I was going to school."

Banner said dryly, "Personally, I'm glad it waited until now." He studied Hommel's expression alertly. "You haven't tried this stuff yourself, Mort?"

"I've made rather extensive use of it. The results have been most gratifying. It's highly stimulating mentally."

"I see. But no actual *work* has been done on the antidote?"

Hommel frowned. "No, I admit, but—"

"Quite a few weeks have gone by."

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"I realize that, and we've found some really interesting approaches, that I think should enable us to solve the problem much more rapidly than if we had simply gone at it blindly, more or less by trial and error."

"Maybe. Well, keep at it. And Mort—"

"Yes?"

"If I were you, I'd go a little easy on those pills."

"We've found no harmful side effects, other than those that are strictly temporary."

Banner nodded. "I could be wrong, Mort. But bear in mind that the dosage we suggest on the bottle is 'one to two capsules daily,' and here we have a letter that says, 'I ate up about half a bottle of your I.Q. pills.' We could get something unexpected out of this. If so, we want people here who aren't worried about getting a dose of the same thing themselves. How about your star chemist, Peabody? Is he using the stuff, too?"

"I'm sorry to say Peabody has acquired an irrational distrust of drugs."

"He won't use it himself?"

"No. And I have to admit, he shows up rather poorly by contrast with those who do."

"He does, eh? Well, Mort, do as you think best. But I'd advise you to think this over."

After Hommel had left, Banner called in Peabody.

"I'm told," said Banner, "that you don't think much of our new brain-booster pills."

Peabody looked harassed.

"It isn't that, sir, but I . . . ah . . . I think I'm probably allergic to them."

"Have you tried them?"

"No, sir."

"Don't you feel that, out of loyalty to the company, you ought to eat up at least a bottle a week?"

"I wouldn't want to eat even one capsule a week."

"Why not?"

Peabody shook his head.

"You never know what the side effects may be."

Banner leaned forward.

"What do you think of the work that's been done in finding an antidote?"

"What work? No work *has* been done."

"Even by you?"

"I've groped around some. I've gotten some ideas. But I can't say I've actually accomplished much yet."

"What do you think of the suggestions that have been made?"

"Oh, some of the *suggestions* have been brilliant. They might take a hundred years, all the laboratory facilities and chemists in the country, and a trillion dollars, but some of the suggestions have really sounded good."

"A little impractical, eh?"

Peabody nodded. "Brilliant, though."

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"Just between the two of us, Peabody, how many pills do you think the average person who uses this stuff takes?"

"Two with every meal, and two when he goes to bed. That night, he dreams of waking up with an I.Q. of 1,500, and when he gets up he chews up two or three extra for good luck."

"*Does* it make him smarter?"

Peabody scratched his head, and looked exasperated.

"Yes, it does, but—I don't know."

"At least, the pill is useful for learning, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. Everyone says it is. It must be. But is learning supposed to be an end in itself? Once they get started on this stuff, they don't stop."

Banner nodded slowly. "We have to have an antidote."

"There may not *be* an antidote. The effect may be irreversible."

"But we have to look, because that's the only way to find out—and there's another thing that might help, if it's taken care of in time."

"What's that?"

"Where does Hommel keep his personal stock of brain pills?"

Peabody's eyes widened.

"In a drawer of his desk— You mean the Cerebrocreatine?"

"Yes. Now, of course, Peabody, I don't want to suggest that you—or anyone, for that matter—might make up a batch of these pills at considerably reduced strength, and put them in place of the pills Hommel has right now. Naturally, I wouldn't suggest such a thing. Nevertheless, if somebody *did* do that, it might just possibly do some good. Of course, if anyone did do it, he would want to think it over carefully first. Peabody I admire people who get things *done*. By the way, it seems to me that it's about time you got an increase in salary, isn't it? Yes, I think so. Well, it's been nice weather lately, hasn't it? If we come up with one more drug like this, I think I may just go into the business of manufacturing fishing rods. Of course, there may be something wrong with that, too. If people would chew their food more before they swallow it, they wouldn't *need* so many pills in the first place. And a little exercise wouldn't hurt, either. What the devil are they doing with these things, anyway, Peabody? Are they trying to see who can get to be smartest by eating the most pills?"

Peabody, listening wide-eyed, swallowed hard, opened his mouth, shut it, recovered his breath, and said, "Yes, sir. They seem to use longer words every day."

Banner nodded. "I've always thought there must be a hole in this somewhere. Well, you think over what we've been talking about, and decide what you want to do. The more people we have actually *working* on this antidote, the better."

Peabody squinted in concentration, then nodded determinedly.

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As time passed sales climbed to a stunning figure.

Hommel told Banner that he'd evidently reached "some kind of a saturation point with the drug, which no longer seemed to have any effect on him."

Peabody received a raise.

Hommel reported that a number of his more outstanding men seemed to have "reached the saturation point."

Peabody received a bonus.

Hommel stated exasperatedly that there was "no word of anyone *else* having reached the saturation point"—only he and some of his best men. And wondered why should that be.

Banner wondered aloud if possibly there could be anything about working in a plant where the drug was manufactured that could have anything to do with it.

Hommel seized on the idea as a possible explanation, and determined to look into it once work on the antidote could be got moving. Save for Peabody, this was still on dead center, no one being able to figure out how to put his grandiose research plans into effect.

"The trouble," said Hommel, "is that there are so many very interesting and exciting alternative approaches to the problem—we scarcely know where to start."

"In that case," said Banner, "start anywhere. But for heaven's sake, *start.*"

"Many of the more promising methods might prove prohibitively expensive."

"Then forget about them. That simplifies the problem."

Hommel looked puzzled. "True," he said, as if he could not quite grasp the concept, but recognized somehow that it was valid.

After Hommel had gone out, Banner stared at the closed door, then shook his head.

"Well, if that's brilliance, let's hope it wears off pretty soon."

More time went by.

Work on the antidote got sluggishly under way, by fits and starts, and with baffling setbacks, as if the work were dogged by gremlins.

Banner, meanwhile, tried to rouse, amongst those in high places, some awareness of possible future difficulties. Those in high places were not aroused, except by enthusiasm for Cerebrocreatine.

Meanwhile, in colleges and universities throughout the world, bell-shaped curves were being knocked into weird corrugated forms. Ranks of straight-A students moved triumphantly toward graduation. Newspaper and magazine articles predicting the arrival of the millennium multiplied like rabbits.

Banner, meanwhile, had trouble with his car. Having had it inexpertly repaired while he was away on a trip, now that he was back he called up to get it taken care of, and invited Hommel to come along with him.

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"All that needs to be done," said Banner, as they walked onto the company parking lot, "is to adjust the carburetor. That shouldn't take too long. We can have lunch a little early, and if they don't have the work done, we'll come back in their courtesy car. I'd adjust it myself, except that they've made so many improvements in the thing that it scares me every time I look under the hood."

Banner got in, and reached over to open the door for Hommel, who by now was seeming more like his usual self. As Hommel slid in and slammed the door, Banner turned the key in the ignition. The engine choked and gagged into life, to run with a galloping rhythm as clouds of black smoke poured out the tail pipe. Like a malfunctioning oil burner on the move, they pulled out onto the highway.

The drive to town turned into a thrilling trip. The car lacked acceleration, and had a tendency to cough and quit. A police officer soon motioned them to the side, parked in front, red light blinking, walked back to their car.

"You're creating a serious hazard in the area of air pollution."

Banner adopted the humble attitude suitable to the occasion. "I'm very sorry, Officer. I made an appointment to get it fixed, and I'm on my way there right now."

"You realize that it's as essential to maintain a vehicle as to purchase it in the first place?"

"Yes, Officer," said Banner humbly.

Just then, a car streaked past at about seventy.

The officer straightened up, hesitated, then said, "As I look at all this traffic, it's impossible not to imagine what it would be like to strip away wheels, trim, and car bodies, leaving only the engines and tail pipes of all these vehicles, pouring out clouds of gaseous contamination. Such a situation would never be tolerated. Yet, the fact that the contamination is incidental, that one contaminating vehicle moves on, to be replaced by a new one, that the source of contamination is covered by trim, and incidental to the purpose of individualized transportation—all this caused the damage inflicted to be overlooked for decades. One wonders what other sources of trouble are similarly concealed by externals."

Banner opened his mouth, and shut it again.

The officer said, "Not long ago, it was necessary for us to learn some new police procedures, and to assist in acquiring the proper degree of mental readiness, I made considerable use of what are known as 'I.Q. capsules.' Quite a number of surprising thoughts occurred to me, based on things I'd heard or read, and hadn't connected together. Were you aware, for instance, that the civilization of ancient Rome may have collapsed because of contamination of the

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drinking water with lead, which was extensively used for water pipes? And have you considered that an ingredient used extensively to prevent 'knocking' in modern motor fuels contains lead? Could our air supply be contaminated as was the Romans' water supply?"

The officer shook his head and glanced around. "Rectify that condition as soon as possible. If I should see it again and it hasn't been alleviated, I'll be compelled to give you a summons."

"Yes, Officer," said Banner. "I'm going right down there."

The policeman nodded, got back in his car, and Banner waited for a break in the traffic.

"Those pills of ours, Mort, seem to get around."

"They certainly do. I wonder if there's anything to what he said?"

"I'll be frank to say, *I* don't know. But I did notice a speeder go past, and he missed it."

They drove into town, and found the car dealer's drive blocked with parked cars. Banner pulled off the road in an adjacent lot where the dealer sold his used cars. Frowning, they got out and walked back.

"It looks to me," said Banner, "as if he has enough work piled up to last for the next three months."

They were walking along a row of used cars, and passed one where a puzzled customer looked into a car's engine compartment, listening to the salesman:

". . . And another thing you might not know, and I wouldn't either, but I've been studying up on it lately, and that's this power brake. Now, you tend to think a power brake *applies power* to the brake, but that's not how it works. What happens here is that the power brakes create a vacuum on *one* side of the piston, while atmospheric pressure—"

The customer looked desperate.

"Look, all I *want*—"

Banner shoved open the door of the showroom, nodded to a group of salesmen leaning against the trunk of a new car, and walked past toward a short hall leading to the garage. From behind came the voices of the salesmen:

". . . And when he did that, she had him dead to rights."

"Sure. It was the same in Schlumberger vs. Mallroyd."

"Oh, I don't know. The decision there was adverse."

"*Was* it? What do you say, Phil?"

"Well, I'd hesitate to go into that. I'm not far enough in the course to say about that. I *thought* so. But I realize there's a lot involved in that. It depends on whether a higher court—"

Banner shoved open another door, walked down a short hall past the open door of an office where a stack of mail lay unopened on a chair, pushed open another door, and he and Hommel walked past a counter where parts were sold, into the garage itself.

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Here they were momentarily struck speechless by a roomful of cars with the hoods up, the mechanics seated at a bench where all the tools had been shoved off onto the floor. The men, comfortably seated at the bench, had books open, writing furiously.

Banner eased through the jam of cars, and peered over their shoulders. They were all working on different pages of separate copies of the same book, a text on calculus. As they filled up the sheets of paper with finished problems, they put them on top of a large stack of such papers, and tore off fresh sheets. Several unopened packs of paper, containing five hundred sheets to the pack, sat on the back of the bench.

From the service manager's cubicle across the room came the ring of a phone, then an obliging voice:

"Sure, bring it right in. We'll get at it first chance we get."

Banner stared across the room, to see the service manager put down the phone, and turn to contemplate a skeleton on a stand. His voice came faintly across the room:

"Clavicle, scapula, sternum, rib; frontal, parietal, occipital, squamous temporal, mastoid temporal, nasal, zygomatic, maxilla, mandible . . ."

Banner eased through the jammed cars, motioned the stupefied Hommel to follow, shoved open the door to the short hall, walked through, shoved open the door to the salesroom, and was greeted by the words, "Was it ethyl ether, or was it a preparation consisting of ethyl ether? In the one case, what they'd run into . . ."

Banner stiff-armed the outer door, to find the same salesman and customer standing by the car. The customer, red-faced, was saying heatedly, ". . . All I'm *in* here for is a car I can use to get to work!"

The salesman nodded.

"But of course you can select a car more intelligently after you learn how they operate. And it's a fascinating study. You'll be surprised, as I was, once you get into it. For instance, were you aware that the present infinitely-variable transmission is a descendant, in a sense, of a development of the 1920s . . ."

Banner walked past to his car, got in, opened Hommel's door, then nursed the engine to life.

"Let's hope, Mort, that this place isn't typical."

"It couldn't be."

"You're right. If it was, the country would have collapsed by now."

They finally found a garage that could do the job, but the mechanic was overloaded with work, and it took a long time.

Somehow, the day's experiences didn't seem to augur well for the future.

As time passed, the men working on the antidote began to see the

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importance of it, and developed a fervor that only Peabody had had before. But it took a long time for this fervor to produce any results.

"I hate to say it," said Hommel, "but it seems to me that this Cerebrocreatine of ours helps study, but somehow prevents *work*."

Banner handed over a newspaper. "Take a look at this, Mort."

Hommel glanced at the paper, to find an article marked in pencil:

SAUGASH AREA BOASTS FOUR COLLEGES!

Saugash, April 22. Work began today on a new neighborhood college, to supplement the Saugash Community College completed here last fall. This brings to four the total of higher educational facilities in the Saugash area, counting Saugash University and Saugash Teachers College.

Dr. Rutherford Dollard Ganst, VI, President of Saugash University, presided at the groundbreaking ceremonies, which were attended by the mayor and many other notables, and a crowd of interested persons estimated at over four thousand.

President Ganst, in a short and memorable address, stated: "Nothing is more important in this day of rapid scientific advance and complex societal change than an informed citizenry. Education alone can create an informed citizenry. Thus the need for education becomes no less vital and urgent than the need for air or water, for food or any other necessity of life. Education has become the basic prerequisite for life today. Nothing is more important. Today, educational qualifications are vital to everyone, from the manual laborer at the bottom, to the head of the great educational system at the top. Employers will not accept the unqualified, because they are seriously lacking in qualifications. Without qualifications there can be no success. Mere ability is no longer enough. Indeed, with sufficient qualifications, one may dispense with ability. It is the *qualifications* that are vital, and only educational institutions may grant qualifications. Thus Education is no longer the necessity of youth alone. Education is now the essential and inescapable concomitant of progress and indeed of existence for every man and every woman of each and every age and condition of life, without exception, from the cradle to the grave. The gigantic dominating growth of our educational system, swelling like a tide to overwhelming proportions never before conceived by the mind of man in all recorded history, cannot be resisted! Nothing can stop it. Nothing can stay it. *Education will be served!* Science requires it. Technology demands it. The towering giants in the field of the

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hierarchy of education itself mandate it! *Education will conquer all!*"

Hommel looked up dizzily.

Banner said, "When you first told me about this pill, Mort, you said, 'It stimulates intellectual activity. It channels energy from gross physical pursuits into imaginative creativity.' The trouble seems to be that it channels a little too *much* energy."

"But what can we do?"

Banner shook his head.

"Keep working on that antidote."

As the days passed, the situation didn't stand still. On a drive to town one afternoon, Banner and Hommel were nearly run off the road by a truck whose driver was studying at sixty miles an hour. A few minutes later, on the flat farmland below the highway, Hommel saw a farmer driving a tractor, reading a book strapped to the steering wheel in front of him. The tractor ran into an electric pole, the book and the farmer were knocked off. The farmer picked up the book and went on reading.

Banner parked on the shoulder of the road behind a car with a flat tire, and looked where Hommel pointed.

He shook his head, then glanced up, and murmured, "Now, what's *this?*"

The car in front had the left rear tire flat, and three men were standing around the open trunk of the car. They seemed to be arguing in a languid way.

"Oh, no," one of them was saying, "I'm sure the essential thing is to *first* jack up the car."

"You mean, *elevate the car on a jack.*"

"Well, my terminology may have been a little imprecise, but—"

The third man broke in. "It's incorrect, in any case. The essential prerequisite is removal of the tire bolts while application of vehicular weight precludes rotation of the wheel."

"Rotation of the wheel? Yes, yes, we're overlooking something. Due to the fact that the wheels are fastened on opposite sides of the car, they rotate in opposite senses, and to prevent inertial loosening of the fastening nuts or cap screws—cap screws in this case, I presume—the 'handedness' of the screw threads is reversed on opposite sides of the vehicles. Now, to loosen a cap screw successfully, it must be rotated in the proper direction. Yet, the thread is screwed in out of sight in the brake drum. *It is not subject to visual observation.*"

"That *is* important. How can we determine the handedness of the threads?"

A perspiring woman stuck her head out the car window.

"Oh, hurry, *Please* hurry."

One of the men sluggishly got out the jack and stood holding it.

"Does anyone have a text, or re-

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pair manual, that might clarify this point?"

The woman put her head out the window again.

"*Please* hurry! The pains are coming closer together!"

One of the men looked around severely.

"Now, don't interrupt. We have a difficult problem here."

The man with the jack leaned it against the bumper, then all three men knelt to scratch diagrams in the dirt on the shoulder of the road.

Banner and Hommel hadn't changed a tire in years, but they could stand it no longer, and got out.

Banner grabbed the jack, and fitted it under the rear bumper. Hommel pulled out a combination tire iron and lug wrench, popped off the wheel cover, and loosened the wheel. Banner jacked the car up. Hommel took the wheel off. Banner got out the spare, and Hommel put it on while Banner put the flat into the trunk, then let down the jack. Hommel banged the wheel cover into place. Banner put the jack in the trunk, Hommel tossed the tire iron inside, and they turned away.

The other three men stood staring. One of them shook a yellow capsule out of a bottle, tossed it into his mouth and swallowed.

"Would you be prepared to do that again? I'm not sure that we've learned all the essential manipulations."

The woman put her head out the window. There was a note of desperate urgency in her voice.

"*The pains are getting closer together!*"

As the car disappeared down the highway, Banner and Hommel stood staring after it.

"How near, Mort, are we to that antidote?"

Hommel had a haunted look.

"No one could say. Peabody seems to be closest. But he could run into trouble any time. Besides, his solution seems to be the least desirable."

"Don't worry about that," said Banner with feeling. "Just as long as we get it while there's time to use it."

Several more weeks crawled by, so slowly that they seemed like months or years. Meanwhile, the gradual overall disintegration turned into specific failures in production and distribution. Little notice of this appeared in newspapers, general magazines, or on radio or television, which were preoccupied with more intellectual matters, particularly "adjusted voting." Under "adjusted voting" each person would cast a number of votes in accordance with his "intellectual level." The more degrees, the more votes. Television networks were carrying the "Debate of the Century" on this plan, the object of the most acrimonious dispute being how many votes should be allowed

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for publication in professional journals. No one dared to disagree with the principle of the plan, lest he label himself as "undereducated." To be "undereducated" was a serious business. The social stigma attached to it was about equivalent to having served two terms in prison for robbing gas stations and grocery stores.

In the midst of all this, with consumption of Cerebrocreatine mounting from week to week, with gigantic new campuses looming over the landscape, with the airwaves thick with learned discussions as the means of existence crumbled, Hommel and Peabody walked into Banner's office.

"Well, we've got it. It's practically a stupidity drug, but it *works.*"

Banner got the new drug on the market in record time. Advertised as "Super*Ak*tion, for active people —instant-acting stimulant to healthful practical activity," it was wholesaled at a very modest profit in "superinhalator bottles," supposed to be used by spraying into the nose and throat.

"For the love of Heaven," said Hommel, "why don't we sell it in *capsules?*"

"It isn't going to sell like wildfire, Mort. Not in the present state of affairs. What one-hundred-percent intellectual is *interested* in healthful practical activity? And what is Cerebrocreatine turning the average person into?"

"I know. We should sell it in some different form. If only—"

Banner shook his head. "Since it will have only a very limited sale, we've got to make the most of it." He picked up a sample inhalator. It was shaped like a small gun, made of violet plastic, with the label on the side of the grip. Banner aimed it across the room, and squeezed the trigger. There was a *squish* sound, and a fine jet of liquid shot out, to leave an oval of tiny droplets on the wall.

Hommel frowned, and looked at the "superinhalator" again.

"When in doubt," said Banner, "rely on human nature. *Real* human nature, with its high points and its low points. Bear in mind, there are likely to be a few unregenerate bullheaded individualists around, regardless of anything formal education can do, even backed up by a thing like Cerebrocreatine."

"I still don't—"

From the window came a rude roar of exhaust, and a screech of brakes.

Banner looked out, to see a truck marked "Central Plumbing" slam to a stop in the drive below. Three men in coveralls jumped out, went around to the rear, yanked out a blow torch, a suction plunger, a coil of wire, and a tool case, and headed for the front door.

Hommel looked out.

"About time. That drain has been plugged for three months." He shook his head dispiritedly.

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"But I still don't see any way that we can hope—"

From a window down below boomed a rough profane voice:

"Where's the drain? We haven't got the whole --- -- - --- day! Great -----! Look at all these stupid --------!"

There was a faint but distinct *squish squish squish* sound.

Hommel stared at Banner, then at the "superinhalator" on his desk.

Banner said, "Practical men use practical means, Mort."

There was a thunder of feet on the staircase down the hall.

Banner and Hommel went into the hallway, to find a research chemist named Smyth looking around dazedly as he tossed yellow capsules into his mouth and contemplated some complex theoretical problem.

Up the stairs burst a couple of brisk men in gray lab coats, followed by three more in coveralls.

Smyth looked at this crew as at a colony of tame ants that has gotten out of its jar.

One of the men in overalls shifted his blowtorch to the other hand, and aimed a small violet gun at Smyth.

"Squish!"

Smyth staggered back against the wall. He sucked in a deep breath, and suddenly his expression changed from dreamy contemplation to astonishment. He banged his fist into his open hand.

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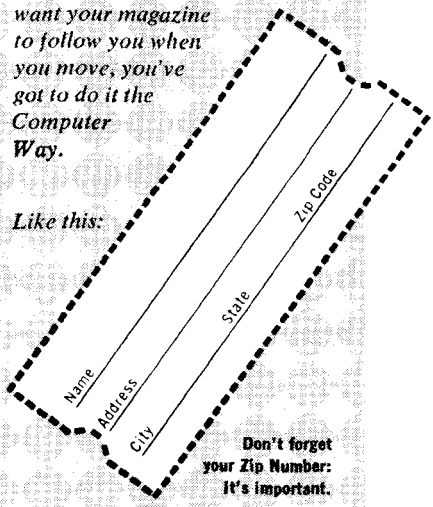

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"Why am I just standing here *thinking* about it? Why not *do* it?"

He strode off down the corridor in one direction as the plumbers vanished around the corner in the other direction.

From around the corner came a sucking pumping sound, followed by a gurgling noise, more sucking and pumping sounds, a good deal of profanity, then a shout of triumph.

"She's unplugged! O.K., boys, let's go!"

Banner nodded.

"That's more *like* it!"

Hommel looked down the hall where Smyth had disappeared.

"Wait a minute. What's he working on—"

There was a thundering noise on the stairs, then the roar of exhaust.

Smyth came hurrying back up the hall, carrying what looked like a silver-coated round-bottomed flask in one hand, and in the other a small bottle of yellowish oily liquid. From the mouth of the silvered flask came a wisp of whitish vapor.

Hommel stared. "Great, holy, leaping—"

"You see, Mort," said Banner, a little expansively, "we've provided the few remaining practical men with the means to convert *intellectuals* into practical men. They, in turn, will be irritated by the intellectuals around *them*. There's the answer to our problem."

Hommel was watching Smyth.

Smyth vanished into his laboratory.

Banner went on, "The trouble with Cerebrocreatine was that it undermined necessities of life at the same time that it gave us fringe benefits we could get along without. That's not progress. Progress is the product of a new advantage *compounding advantages we already have.*"

He paused as Smyth came out, holding in one gloved hand a shiny rod bearing at its end a clamp. The clamp gripped a small unstoppered bottle of yellowish oily liquid.

Smyth insinuated the rod around the door frame, peered into the room, drew the door almost shut, turned his face away, and tilted the rod.

BAM!

The building jumped. Fire shot out around the edges of the door. Black smoke rolled out behind the flames.

Smyth threw off the smoking glove, sniffed the air, then sucked his fingers.

"Well, *that* didn't work."

He turned away, drew in a deep breath, then went back into his laboratory. There was immediately the whir of a powerful draft sucking up fumes.

"Hm-m-m," said Banner, looking thoughtfully at the partly open door.

Smyth reappeared, unrolling what looked like a small coil of bell

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wire. He tacked a loop to the door frame, then, still unrolling wire, went back into the laboratory. Wisps of smoke were still trailing out around the top of the door, but this didn't seem to slow him down. He came out, cut the loop, stripped the insulation off the two ends, pounded in another tack, and hammered it flat to hold the two wires. Then he bent the ends of the wires apart, so they wouldn't touch—yet.

Hommel cleared his throat.

"Ah . . . Dr. Smyth . . . I wonder if perhaps . . . a little more theoretical consideration of the thermodynamics of the reaction—?"

"Theoretical considerations be damned," said Smyth. "The only way we're going to find out is to try it and see what products we get."

He raised his left arm over his head, shielding one ear with his shoulder and the other with his fingers, then he touched the bare ends of the two wires together.

BOOM!

The building jumped.

Cracks shot up the wall.

There was a heavy shattering crash from overhead.

As the roar died away, the smash and tinkle of breaking glass could be heard throughout the building.

Smyth shoved the door slightly open, and a grayish cloud poured out. He wafted some of the fumes in his direction, and sniffed cautiously.

His face lit in a triumphant smile.

"*That* saves some time!"

He pulled the door shut, and headed toward the stockroom.

Hommel turned to Banner, "How is *this* an improvement? We were better off with theorists!"

"We've overshot the mark again. This stuff is too strong."

"There's a threshold effect. If you don't use enough, you get no result you can detect."

A small crowd was gathering in the hall to see what was going on. Banner separated Peabody from the pack.

"Peabody, my boy," said Banner, "we've got this last problem pretty well licked, thanks to your antidote. But there's still one little loose end that we've got to take care of."

Peabody looked apprehensive.

"What's that, sir?"

Banner shook his head.

"*Now* we need an antidote for the antidote." ■

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One way to get rival factions to submerge differences and pull together is to present them with a common menace so great that they're both scared silly!

VERGE FORAY

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

When the opportunity finally came, Starn didn't like it.

The worst aspect of it was that he would have to *use* his wife Cytherni, without her knowledge or agreement. This would be far less forgivable than the use Higgins had made of *him,* to get rid of the telehypnotic megalomaniac Nagister Nornt. Although Starn had required a little coaxing along the way, he had been a willing weapon in the hands of the Olsapern Minister of Domestic Defense. Nornt had abducted Cytherni, and that gave Starn ample reason of his own for wanting the man killed.

Nevertheless, while he liked Higgins well enough, Starn could not quite forget that the man had used him. This was a source of antagonism that lingered after five years of frequent association between the two men. Higgins had done his duty effectively by using Starn, and had to be respected for that. But Starn couldn't *admire* him for it.

How, then, could he ever hope for Cytherni to forgive her own husband if he pulled the scheme he had in mind?

The idea hit him late one afternoon when, feeling frustrated by the slowness of his research work, he had left his workshop and strolled through the house to visit Cytherni's studio. She was working on a large abstract piece of paint-sculpture, so he perched on a stool to chat with her while he watched.

Paint-sculpting was a highly sophisticated and effective art form, and the process of creating in this field was a fascinating one to observe. The "canvas" was a three-dimensional matrix of menergy—stuff related to the solid force fields which formed the Hard Line defensive barrier along the Olsapern border—into which paint was injected and precisely located through slender needles of unwettable insulation. The elements of the menergy matrix were flexible

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enough to allow limited motion, which was powered like the matrix itself by a small nuclear source that usually wound up well concealed in the finished work of art.

The injected paint did not dry; it remained liquid and mobile, but confined by the matrix elements to its proper place in the composition. It could gleam with the wetness of life, of glowing lips or bedewed leaves. And depending on the motions of matrix elements, lips could smile, leaves could quake, sunlit waters could ripple.

The art form was one which Cytherni had mastered quickly after coming to Olsapern country. Because of her Pack upbringing, her works had an appeal for the Olsaperns that was both primitive and exotic, and were in much demand.

In a way this bothered Starn. In the austere society of the Packs, a husband who did not provide for his family was a worthless creature, deserving of little respect. Conditions were, of course, different among the Olsaperns. The necessity of "earning a living" was a concept that didn't apply where advanced technologies supplied an abundance of the necessities and luxuries of life. A person's worth was judged by criteria other than his earning power.

Yet, even from the Olsapern viewpoint, the fact was that Cytherni was providing something society found worthwhile, and Starn was not. She was the valuable member of the family. And Starn, who chose to devote himself to investigation of the Novo senses, was doing something the Olsaperns not only failed to appreciate, but refused to recognize as even having potential value.

Starn was as philosophical as he could be about this, but couldn't help feeling like a squaw-man sometimes. His self-esteem had to suffer terrific punishment, and would have suffered still more if he hadn't been thoroughly convinced of the importance of his researches.

But all in all, he was not an unhappy man. He could appreciate his work though nobody else could —except, of course, his young son Billy and to some extent Cytherni. And he had his wife and boy.

For a man who was grimly determined to rip up the fabric of human society, Starn was about as content as any man could possibly be.

"What do you think you're grinning at?" Cytherni mock-scolded.

Starn chuckled. "Same thing as usual. Those busts of Billy." He motioned toward the two life-size replicas of their son's head and shoulders sitting side by side on a nearby table. "Maybe they're not great art to the Olsaperns, but I think they're the most delightful work you've done!"

"You're as bad as Billy!" she

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complained, although she was obviously pleased. "It's not enough for him to stand giggling at them for ten minutes at a time. After lunch today he brought three of his playmates in to join him."

"Did they see the humor?"

"Yes indeed. The little Carsen boy nearly split his sides. They're not *that* funny!"

"I'm not so sure," said Starn, walking over to take another close look at the heads.

Unlike her usual work, these were strictly representational. Each of them looked enough like Billy to be a color triphoto. And at first glance, there was no difference at all between the pair. Only after looking at them for a few moments would someone who knew the boy's parents realize that one of the pieces grasped that which was his mother in the son while the other portrayed him as a reincarnation of his father. To a large degree, these separate resemblances were brought out not by form but by subtle differences in motion of the head, eyes, eyebrows, lips and chin. The movements were all slight, but they succeeded in capturing the special little individual mannerisms of each parent.

The wonder of it to Starn was that Cytherni had been able to portray *herself* with such amused objectivity.

Why had she done the pair of portraits? His guess was that they had a religious significance to her, that they were an apologetic memorial to a god she no longer worshiped: the Sacred Gene, deity of the Packs.

"I know who would like to have them, and wouldn't find them funny at all," she remarked.

"Who?"

"The grandparents. The one with you in it for your folks, and the one I'm in for mine."

Starn nodded thoughtfully. Yes, his own parents would cherish that lifelike representation of Billy, especially so since they had never been permitted to learn that Starn himself had survived the conflict with Nagister Nornt. So would Cytherni's people in Pack Diston. Continuity of genetic inheritance was all-important to Pack people. A concrete reminder of Billy's existence would mean much to his grandparents.

"Do you suppose we can send them the portraits?" asked Cytherni.

"We can ask Higgins about it tonight," said Starn. "It will be up to him to say if it's all right."

"You'll ask him?" Cytherni persisted.

"Yes, after supper when he's full of venison steak."

She nodded her satisfaction.

But Starn had little doubt that Higgins' answer would be negative. Because . . . well, he could imagine a number of reasons the Defense Minister might consider important.

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That was when the idea struck him. He fought against it for a while, dismayed by the personal unhappiness it could bring to his wife—and also to himself and to Billy. But he had a strong conviction his scheme would work, while nothing else would.

So, if Higgins did turn down their request, and if Cytherni's desire to get the portraits to the grandparents was as determined as Starn suspected, then . . .

"Why so silent, lover?" Cytherni asked.

"Oh . . . thinking about my work," said Starn, "trying to figure out how to make some progress with it." Which was true enough.

Cytherni smiled encouragingly. "Give yourself time, Starn. You'll do it."

"Maybe." He stood up. "I'll give it a little more effort before supper."

He walked back toward his workshop, but detoured into the flier port on the way. If he tried his scheme, there were preparations to be made, precautions to be taken, things to be checked.

He spent several minutes going over the flier, and examining the emergency supplies and equipment in its luggage compartment. He added a few more items from his workshop and the kitchen shelves. Then he stood in the port, gazing at the craft in momentary uncertainty.

There would be at least one tracking device on the flier, probably several. Without question, he and Cytherni were kept under close surveillance by Higgins' department. Nothing less than that would make sense. While he and Cytherni had been welcomed into Olsapern society and given all the freedom of other Olsapern citizens, the fact remained that they were enemy aliens by birth and upbringing. The Minister of Domestic Defense would have had to be stupid indeed not to keep close tabs on their behavior.

So the ship contained trackers—and for that matter so doubtless did his own body, and Cytherni's, perhaps Billy's as well. And a tracker could do double duty as an auditory pickup, a bug. On his forays against Nagister Nornt, Starn's fortunes had been followed from a distance, through such devices in his body, by Olsapern observers and mop-up men.

The trackers in the flier, he decided, would have to be left undisturbed. But not those in himself, his wife, and son. They had to be put out of action when the proper time came.

And he wasn't at all sure he could knock out the trackers by the method he had in mind! If he failed, his scheme was doomed from the beginning—and the Olsaperns certainly would not allow him sufficient freedom afterward to try again.

A man had to be pretty desper-

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ate, he suddenly realized, to forge ahead with so risky an enterprise. But if he passed up the opportunity Cytherni had unwittingly provided, when, if ever, would he get another?

He couldn't back down.

After Higgins and Starn were settled down to the enjoyment of a couple of pre-supper drinks, the conversation was inconsequential for a while. Then Higgins asked in a slighting tone, "Well, lad, I suppose you're still trying to make sense out of the Novo senses?"

Starn nodded. He had hoped Higgins would bring the subject up during this visit. "Yes, I'm still at it. In fact, I think I'm making some progress. There's something I'd like you to look at while you're here."

Higgins grimaced. "No thanks. Such things are out of my line. If you think you've discovered something worth consideration by others, take it up with some expert in the field."

"Such as who?" demanded Starn with a humorless grin. "You have no experts on the Novo senses—only experts in saying the field isn't worth studying."

Higgins shrugged. "Well, they ought to know! I wish, Starn, that you would get this pointless obsession out of your system, and devote yourself to *valuable* work. It's a shame for a creative talent such as yours to go to waste. I mean that! You've got one of the best minds on Earth, and one that has become well-educated since you left the Packs. Why can't you put it to work on one of the major unsolved mysteries of science, for instance?"

"Aside from the fact that I think what I'm doing is more important," Starn answered slowly, "there's also the point that I haven't lived with my Olsapern education long enough to use it with the ease a creative researcher needs. My memory's full of new information, but somehow that information is not wholly available to my thinking processes. For example, I've learned a great deal about microlek circuitry, but I don't think I'll ever be able to use that learning to discover a useful new circuit. In the work I'm doing now, when I need to devise a circuit, I seem to fall back on what I've known about basic electricity ever since I was a boy."

He shook his head and added, "Even if my mind is all you say it is, I can't compete with Olsapern scientists who grew up knowing things I've just learned for the first time. I wish I could. If I could really bring Olsapern science to bear on the problem of the Novo senses, well, I imagine the results would startle all of us! That's what gripes me, Higgins. You have people with the background and ability to break open a vast area of knowledge—knowledge about man himself!—but these people's minds are

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completely closed. Your so-called experts won't give the Novo senses the briefest attention!"

Higgins chuckled. "We've been over all this before, Starn. I've explained the limitations of Novo senses that make them a dead end. The human nervous system has to function within its structural boundaries. Your best telepaths, for instance, have a range of little more than half a mile. But through the use of his vocal chords, aided by languages and electronic devices conceived by his fertile imagination, the ordinary man can communicate over distances of millions of miles.

"So, when you start trying to develop Novo senses, you can't go very far before you come to an impassable barrier, erected by the limited size and power of the human brain. That stops you cold! Whereas, if you would forget these Novo senses, and put your bet on the unlimited ability of the imagination to devise means of extending and strengthening our natural abilities—means such as languages, telescopes, power tools, powered vehicles, and so on—no stopping place is ever reached!"

"But what you refuse to see," complained Starn, "is that the Novo senses *are* natural abilities, just waiting to be extended and strengthened! You're concentrating on aiding only a few of our senses while neglecting a vast unexplored range!"

Higgins frowned. Starn had never expressed his views in just that way before, and it gave the Defense Minister a thought to pause over. "In a way, that's true, Starn. But by its very nature, science has to be universally applicable. The results of an experiment must be verifiable by another experimenter, working under strictly specified and controlled conditions. And the products of science, therefore, must be useful to everyone. Even if telepathy were likely to survive as a human sense—which it is not, of course—the scientist could not afford to waste much of his energies trying to produce a . . . a *pathoscope* . . . to permit telepaths to read minds over great distances. Not unless telepathy became universal. At this time not even a majority of Pack men have it."

"We don't *know* that," objected Starn. "We only know that a minority of people have enough telepathy for it to be useful. Maybe everybody has a touch of it, waiting to be amplified and extended. That's one of the possibilities we ought to be investigating."

"However," grinned Higgins, "none of the regular senses are subliminal. We have enough sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch to use very well the way we're born with them. I can't take this idea of 'hidden senses' very seriously."

"What you say reminds me of what the common-sense folk said when inventors were working on

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the first aircraft," Starn remarked. " 'If God meant for man to fly, He would have given us wings.' "

Higgins laughed. "Trying to win an argument with you, Starn, is a task I hope my life never depends upon! You always have a comeback! Unfortunately, though, scientific discoveries aren't made by winning debates. Discoveries require demonstrable proof, not argument."

"And you or nobody else is about to look at what demonstrable proof I have," Starn finished sadly. "Oh, well. How's your own work going, Higgins?"

"Fine."

"The defense system's working like a well-oiled machine, huh?"

Higgins puckered his lips. "I wish you wouldn't bring up the word 'oil'," he complained wryly. "That's one of my biggest headaches."

"Oil is?" asked Starn as if he didn't know.

"Yes."

"Isn't oil easy to produce?"

"Well, that depends on the oil. Some kinds are very difficult to synthesize out of vegetable products. We must still depend on natural petroleum deposits for those. The trouble is that the deposits were badly drained during the Science Age, to use as fuel, of all things!" He sipped his drink and added, "Of course we've located new deposits, but they're subject to strict conservation restrictions, which allow us to tap only twenty percent of known reserves at any time. As of right now, we've used sixteen percent, and no new oil has been discovered lately. I'd hate to see us forced by necessity to ease our conservation policy, and start plundering the planet the way our ancestors did."

Starn nodded. "Cut down on your need for the oils you can't synthesize," he suggested.

"Oh, we've done that. But for certain types of heavy defense equipment—"

"That's what I mean. Cut down on your need for defense equipment. Make peace with the Packs."

Higgins laughed. "Not only does it take two to make a fight, lad; it takes two to make peace once the fight has started. When I say 'defense' equipment I'm not employing a euphemism. You know as well as I that it is the Packs who really have the tradition of combat. You yourself were a warrior by profession! If we want to keep our land orderly, we have to keep Pack raiders out, and keep their conflicts among themselves down to a reasonable level. No, we need the defenses we have in operable condition, Starn."

"I suppose so," the younger man replied. "Tell me, Higgins, can you get the oil out of deep shale deposits?"

"Shale underground? Yes, a special sweating process was developed years ago for that. Why do you ask?"

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"Because I know where such a deposit is," Starn replied casually, although this was the disclosure he had been building toward. "It's about thirty miles southwest of Norhog Mountain. The oil shale is seventy feet thick, lies about twenty-six hundred feet below the surface, and has an area of a little more than nine square miles."

Higgins put his drink down so hard that some sloshed onto the table. "What . . . how. . . ?"

Starn got up and pulled a map from his desk. "This shows its outline, marked in red," he said, handing the map over.

Higgins clutched the paper and stared at the marked area. Finally he looked up. "Are you sure about this? Deep shale deposits aren't easy to detect, the oil experts tell me. Whose equipment did you use, and how did you happen to go looking for oil? I thought you were all wrapped up in this Novo sense business."

"This *is* Novo sense business," said Starn. "The equipment I used was some I made myself, based on the ancient dowsing rod. Only I didn't use the equipment myself. Billy was the operator. He seems to have a stronger perception sense. We hit upon that shale oil deposit by accident during a short camping trip I took him on in late spring. I made a game out of it for the boy. We crisscrossed the area in the flier for an hour or so while he mapped the deposit's boundaries."

Higgins threw the map down with a grunt of disgust. "I should've guessed it would be something like that, coming from you!" he huffed. He finished the remains of his drink and stared angrily at the wall while Starn refilled his glass.

"I thought of drilling an exploratory well, to prove the oil is there," said Starn, "but decided to leave that up to you. If you need oil so badly, you can't afford not to send somebody out there to take a look."

"Nonsense! There's no oil there!"

"There might be, for all you know," Starn replied. "If you need an excuse, you can always say you were looking through some old geological studies and found previously ignored indications that the area might yield oil."

"Forget it, Starn! I'm not wasting anybody's time by sending them on a wild-goose chase!"

Starn shrugged and changed the subject. But he noticed that Higgins glanced sideways at the map several times before Cytherni called them to supper.

The venison steak quickly brought Higgins out of the grumpy mood Starn had gotten him into. "I'll leave it to others to gush over your paint-sculptures, Cytherni," he said when he finally pushed away from the table. "What you do in the kitchen is art enough for me!"

"Thank you," she murmured modestly.

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"Cythie's done a couple of pieces since you were here before," Starn said, "that you might like. Come take a look at them, won't you?"

Higgins regarded him with friendly suspicion. "Nothing Novosensey about them, is there?"

"No," Starn laughed. "No more of that tonight."

"All right."

Cytherni led the way into her studio where Higgins admired the busts of Billy with genuine approval. At length Starn said, "We were thinking the boy's grandparents would enjoy these more than anybody else. Could you arrange to have one delivered at Foser Compound and the other at Diston Compound?"

Higgins thought about it for a moment, then shook his head regretfully. "I'm afraid not. It would be unwise to remind your families of yourselves, and especially of your son. Those portraits would be a constant source of agitation, I'm afraid. The Packs recognized you as a remarkable man, Starn, with an ability that was unheard of—your trick of acting swiftly, without an instant of forethought that a telepath could detect. If they were reminded by these portraits that you had a son who is in our hands, there's no telling what ridiculous lengths they would go to, trying to get him away from us. It's best for everybody, Starn, for them not to know for sure that Cytherni ever recovered from her trauma sufficiently to give birth to her child, or to have even the slightest suspicion—which one of these portraits might arouse—that you are alive."

He looked at them and saw the deep disappointment in Cytherni's face. "I'm really sorry," he said sincerely. "I know the grandparents would love to have these, but . . . well, I'm sorry."

"That's O.K.," said Starn. "We know how it is."

But Cytherni said nothing, and had a stubborn glint in her eyes, Starn noticed.

As soon as Higgins' flier lifted away into the dark night Cytherni erupted. "Starn, I'm *not* going to just forget—"

He put his hand over his mouth and looked meaningfully at her. She fell silent.

"Let's go inside," he said. "Did you see the drawings Billy brought home from school this morning?" he asked. "They're over here. Maybe he's an artist, too. Come take a look."

"He didn't say anything to me —" Cytherni began in a puzzled tone, following Starn to the desk.

He picked up a note pad and wrote on it: *"Don't answer out loud. How badly do you want the portraits delivered?"*

She took the pad and scrawled in large angry letters: *"VERY!"*

Starn wrote: *"O.K., we'll deliver them ourselves."*

Cytherni: *"How and when?"*

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Starn: *"By flier. We leave before dawn."*

For a moment Cytherni seemed about to reject the idea. She wrote: *"We can't leave Billy by himself."*

Starn: *"We'll take him along."*

Cytherni: *"Higgins will throw a fit!"*

Starn: *"Let him."* He was glad he was writing instead of saying all this. A frog of guilt was clogging his throat.

Cytherni: *"I'll go alone. You stay with Billy."*

Starn: *"We share everything including trouble. We all go, or nobody goes."*

Cytherni's eyes moistened, and suddenly she kissed him. *"All right,"* she wrote, *"what do we have to do?"*

Starn: *"Leave that to me. Let's get to bed."* Aloud he said, "Well, what do you think of Billy's art?"

"Perhaps he takes more after you than me," she said.

Starn chuckled.

II

At four a.m. Starn woke. He rose quietly and went into his workshop where he paused uncertainly, asking himself if, in the near-dawn of a new day, he really wanted to go through with this.

His determination overrode his misgivings. He sat down at the bench on which the small dowser machine was perched and picked up the sensor unit. Slowly, he explored his arms and legs with the device, moving it along his skin with only a fraction of an inch keeping it from touching him. He needed to practice that, because when he was through with himself he would have to search Cytherni and Billy the same way, but without waking them.

As he had expected, the machine told his perception of no device in arms or legs. Limbs can be lost in accidents, making them poor locations for tracker bugs. He was relieved when an examination of his head failed to wiggle the rod needles. He went on to explore his body.

The device was buried inside his rib cage, near the front and to the right. When he found it, he took readings on it from several directions, to pinpoint its location as finely as his not-too-precise machine would permit.

Then came the crucial job: the destruction of the bug. With access to the proper Olsapern surgical equipment, the device could have simply been removed, painlessly and without leaving a scar. But Starn had no such equipment. He had to take the far less certain course of attempting to knock out the bug and leave its wreckage in place.

One of the difficulties was that he had no sample bug with which to experiment. He had to assume the device was similar in construction to other small microlek gadg-

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ets, and could be disrupted by a focused ultrasonic beam, which was the only tool at Starn's disposal that seemed remotely likely to do the job.

He had to use the beam cautiously. If the focus fell outside the bug rather than inside it, the ultrasonics could produce potentially dangerous internal injuries. He positioned the beamer with care, and triggered a three-second burst. He felt a tingle but no real pain, so the focus probably had been on target.

At any rate he had to assume that. Somewhere miles away, in some Domestic Defense installation, a point of light on a map had suddenly gone dark, he guessed. And perhaps, too, an alarm had gone off. He would have to move fast from now on.

He took his equipment into the bedroom where Cytherni was still sleeping soundly. Luckily for his purpose, she was lying on her back, and he quickly learned that her tracker bug was located similarly to his own. When he hit it with the ultrasonics she did not flinch, but stirred slightly. He quickly shoved his equipment under the bed and out of sight.

Cytherni opened her eyes and started to speak. He laid his fingers on her lips for an instant. She nodded, and he gestured the message that she should go prepare breakfast.

When she was in the kitchen Starn took his equipment to Billy's bedside. The boy didn't wake when Starn triggered the ultrasonics, which was all to the good. The longer he slept, the longer telltale conversation could be delayed.

Twenty minutes later, after a silent, hurried breakfast with Cytherni, Starn helped her place the portraits in cushioned cartons and load them into the flier. Then he carried the still-sleeping Billy aboard and bedded him comfortably on the long passenger seat. With Cytherni beside him, he sat down at the controls, turned on the engines, and lifted the craft out of its housing and into a steep, southward climb.

He didn't really expect immediate pursuit. What he was doing was far from an everyday occurrence. Whatever Olsapern defensemen were keeping vigil at this hour of the morning should, for a little while, be more puzzled than alarmed by whatever their instruments were telling them. By the time they swung into action, he hoped, he would be far to the south of the Hard Line. Then they could pursue him, but not intercept him.

As it turned out no pursuit at all materialized. Not once did another flier come within craft-radar range as Starn streaked south, high over the Hard Line and into Pack territory.

"Hey! Are we going camping?"

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Billy piped suddenly, waking up and staring around.

Starn turned in his seat and grinned at the boy. "Good morning, sleepy-head. We're delivering some presents."

"Oh. What happened to breakfast?"

"We brought yours along," said his mother, rising. "Come sit up front with Daddy and I'll get it."

The boy took her place and stared out curiously. The sun was rising and he remarked knowingly, "We're going south!"

"That's right," said Starn. "We're taking presents to my mommy and daddy, and to Mommy's mommy and daddy."

Billy thought this over while Cytherni snapped his tray into the seatrack. "Will we get to see them?" he asked.

"No. We'll drop their presents by chute."

Billy nodded thoughtfully and began eating.

"I'll put the chutes on now," said Cytherni.

"Better put one on yourself, for safety," said Starn carefully. "Unless you want to pilot while I toss them out."

"No, I'll do it." Cytherni strapped on a chute and busied herself with the packages.

"At this altitude we'd better put on helmets, too, before I open the hatch," said Starn.

"I will when I finish eating," said Billy.

Several minutes passed. "Coming up on Diston Compound in thirty seconds," Starn announced, mashing the hatch-control button.

Billy snorted as the air thinned and put on his helmet. "Where?" he asked, craning his neck. "I want to see."

"There," Starn pointed.

Billy busied himself with the magniviewer, with which he was quite proficient, and studied the close-up appearance of his mother's home village with intense curiosity. Starn, meanwhile, was timing the drop and keeping an eye on Cytherni in the rearview mirror.

"About time now," he warned. "Be careful around that open hatch."

"O.K. Say when," Cytherni's voice sounded in his helmet phones over the roar of wind past the open hatch in front of her.

"Five seconds," replied Starn. "Two, one, *now!*"

Cytherni pushed a carton out, and leaned forward to watch it fall, one hand grasping the edge of the opening while she needlessly shielded her goggle-protected eyes from the wind with the other.

"Chute's working fine," she reported.

"Good. We're about two minutes from Foser Compound. Get the other one in position."

"Can I help?" asked Billy, stirring in his seat.

"No," said Starn tightly. "Stay

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where you are so you can see the Compound."

"In fact," said Starn, "I'd better strap you in to make sure you do." He leaned over and snapped the safety belt in place over the boy's middle.

"Good idea," approved Cytherni. "It's too windy back here for you, Billy."

"There's Foser Compound now, son," Starn pointed. The boy's attention was again glued on the magniviewer. "See the river? I swam there when I was your age."

"How's the time?" demanded Cytherni.

"Eighteen seconds yet. No hurry," said Starn, hoping he did not sound as tight as he felt. "Five . . . two, one, *now!*"

The second carton went through the hatch and again Cytherni leaned after it with her precarious one-handed grip.

Starn's teeth clenched as he gave the control wheel a sudden jerk. The flier rolled to the left and swerved to the right . . . and Cytherni was jerked through the hatch.

"Starn! I fell out!" Her voice yelped in his earphones.

"Your chute!" he snapped.

"It's working. I'm all right. We must have hit an air pocket! I was holding on, Starn!" she apologized. "Really I was!"

"Don't worry about it," said Starn. "I'll bring the flier down after you, and pick you up."

"No! Not here, with Billy aboard!" she objected.

"I'll try to make it quick," argued Starn.

"Absolutely no!" Cytherni ruled. "I won't permit our son to have contact with these telepaths! You know how I feel about that!"

Indeed Starn did. He felt the same way himself, to some extent. As children, he and his wife had been obliged to try to channel their very thoughts into lines approved by Pack society, and enforced by Pack telepaths. Cytherni had never adjusted to these mental restrictions, and had not been truly happy until happenstance left her among the Olsaperns, who were not only nontelepathic but detested all the Novo senses.

In Starn's judgment, a brief encounter with the disapproval of Pack telepaths might be unpleasant for Billy, but would be a challenge that might actually do the boy more good than harm. After all, Billy was over six years old, and already had a self-confidence that was not easily shaken. But Cytherni could not take that rational view—in fact, Starn had counted on her reacting in just this manner.

"Besides," she was saying, "you should stay up beyond telepathic range. It's bad enough for them to learn what *I* know! Oh, Starn, why did I get us into this awful mess?"

"Easy, dearest!" he soothed. "It's not as awful as all that! Despite

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what the Olsaperns think, I don't believe a knowledge of the strength of Olsapern civilization will turn the Packs into jungle animals! A lot of Olsapern ideas about genetic history are pure rot, used to justify the Olsaperns' belief in their own superiority. The Packs aren't on the edge of a genetic collapse!"

"I hope you're right," responded Cytherni uncertainly. "But just the same, you and Billy stay up there!"

"All right," agreed Starn. "It's too late to hope to keep this little jaunt a secret from Higgins, anyway. I'll circle till you're down safely. The Olsapern defensemen can come later to pick you up. Is that O.K.?"

"Yes."

"One thing, Cythie," Starn said hesitantly. "Whatever happens, remember that I love you . . . very much."

"I do, too, Mommy!" put in Billy, who had been sitting still, in shocked dismay, ever since his mother tumbled from the flier.

"Bless you both!" she sobbed.

When she was safely on the ground Starn returned the flier to a straight course.

"Mommy will be all right, won't she?" asked Billy.

"Yes, the Fosers will be nice to her," Starn assured him.

That satisfied the boy, and he again turned his attention to their flight. "We're still going south," he remarked.

"Southwest," said Starn.

"Not going home?" Billy asked.

"No . . . since your mommy's not there."

This made sense to Billy. He nodded. "Camping, then?"

"Yes, we're going camping."

"Will you let me shoot this time?"

Starn nodded. "Yes, I'll show you how to shoot."

"Oh boy!" exclaimed Billy in delight.

Starn put the controls on automatic, with the flight computer programmed to keep the southwest heading for eight hours and then bring the flier down for a landing. That would put the craft far south of the equator, and over the ocean. With the hatch left open, the flier would sink when it landed.

He left his seat and went into the back of the flier where he had stored the equipment and supplies. He bundled the stuff stoutly into two chute packs and placed them by the hatch. He strapped the one remaining chute to himself.

"Where are we going to camp?" asked Billy.

"That'll be a surprise. Somewhere you haven't been before." By now, Starn was certain, Olsapern ears were straining for every word of conversation detected by the flier's bugs. He wanted to say nothing that would tell more of his destination than the Olsaperns could learn from the path of the flier. In fact, he hoped to make

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them uncertain of the exact time he chuted out.

He went forward to stand by Billy's chair, and gazed down at the landscape for a moment. They were already well into the modest heights of the northern end of the mountain range. Packs were scattered through these hills, but not farther south, where the peaks soared high and discouragingly steep. In old times, Starn knew, even the tallest mountains felt the tread of man's boots, and the blades of his dozers. But now the heart of the range stood wrapped in lonely grandeur, unwanted by men too engrossed in other pursuits to expend their energies exploring territory that was, after all, thoroughly mapped by their ancestors. The dense cover of fir and pine now sheltered only such creatures as were there before men came, and after men left.

The taller peaks were coming into view as Starn watched. He unsnapped the breakfast tray from Billy's chair and helped the boy to his feet.

"Now," he said, "no more talking. I have a special reason. O.K.?"

Billy looked up at him with wide eyes, and nodded.

Starn patted him approvingly on the head and led him back through the cabin. From some extra cargo straps he rigged a body-harness for the boy, and tied a strap-end tightly around his own belt. He intended to chute out carrying the boy in his arms, but if the wind tore them apart the harness would enable him to pull the boy back.

As an afterthought he removed both their helmets, which were probably as trackable as bugs to the Olsaperns. And for the hundredth time since the trip started, he wondered if he had really succeeded in disrupting their body bugs. He shrugged. He would know in an hour or two. If the Olsapern defensemen came swarming down around them, the bugs would still be doing their job.

He leaned out the hatch from time to time to study the land below. The sun was now high enough for him to judge the roughness of terrain by the size, shape, and depth of shadows, without which the rugged hills would have appeared paper-flat from the flier's altitude.

At last he decided the mountains were as high and desolate as they were going to get. He motioned Billy to him, cradled the boy tightly against his chest, kicked the chute packs out the hatch, and jumped after them.

The flier was already out of sight when he thought to look for it. Billy was hammering his arm with a little fist. "What is it, son?" he said.

"Can I talk now?" Billy asked.

III

Cytherni was, by nature, a blab-

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ber-brain. It was this trait that had made her childhood and adolescence in Pack Diston so miserable. Her mind simply refused self-censorship, and the very act of attempting to direct it into the channels prescribed by Pack mores was all too likely to trigger the forbidden thought-train she was trying hardest to avoid. Throughout her early years she had felt a cloud of disapproval hovering about her wherever she went.

Her marriage to Starn, and entry into Pack Foser, had partially dispersed this cloud, not due to any conscious effort on her part but simply because being Starn's wife preoccupied her mind with thoughts that were quite normal for a young married woman and, therefore, thoroughly acceptable.

But not until she had lived among the Olsaperns for a while did she come to appreciate that the untamable quality of her mind could be anything but a disastrous handicap, that it was indeed the kind of mind that creates most of the world's great art. A mind that accepts the discipline of form, but that insists on having its way about content.

Not surprisingly, after basking in Olsapern approval for several years, her mind was now less controllable than ever.

Thus, the people of Pack Foser had learned, within an hour after she chuted down in a nearby cabbage field, more about Olsapern civilization and Olsapern world views than any followers of the Sacred Gene had ever known before. The knowledge was greeted with shock, surprise, dismay, and some disbelief, but mostly with disdain.

And the news of it began to spread, in the usual erratic way, through telepathic farmers who lived within range of both the Compound and more distant telepaths. Also, a messenger on horseback was sent to carry the word of Cytherni's return to Diston Compound some thirty-five miles away.

"Please don't read me!" she had begged when the men had come running from Foser Compound to the spot where she landed. *"It might hurt you!"*

Of course her plea had no effect. They read, and talked, and read.

Her first encounter with Starn's old crony Rob, after she was brought into the Compound, was more or less typical. It began with surprise at the emblem of Raid Leader that adorned Rob's belt, and at hearing him addressed as "Foser." Later she learned that the old Foser had died quite recently, and Rob had been elevated to the Pack chieftainship but was retaining his old post until a new Raid Leader could be competitively selected.

She was surprised because she remembered Rob as a pleasant fellow for a telepath, but nevertheless a coward. Could *he* be a Raid

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Leader of Pack Foser, she wondered, after a man like Starn? But, she recalled, Rob *had* done one brave, almost foolhardy, thing: he had volunteered to go with some Olsapern defensemen on a mission across the Hard Line, to monitor and validate to Starn a lecture on genetic history by the Olsapern scientist Richhold. Starn had related the details of that meeting to her, and she recalled them well, including the fact that Rob's memory of the affair was erased before he was returned home.

"So *that's* what happened!" remarked Rob with a cold smile. "I've often wondered. And Starn says this Richhold had me halfway convinced, huh?"

Cytherni nodded. Richhold's lecture had been an eye-opener for both of the young Pack men, who knew of the infidel theories of the Olsaperns but had not previously been exposed to the evidence on which the theories were based. It was much later before Starn arrived at some theories of his own that accounted for the evidence at least as well as did the beliefs of the Olsaperns. Starn had been "present" at the lecture through an artificial body, and Rob had been unable to read him because his brain was far away, in the hospital, directing the growth of a new normal body to replace the one damaged beyond repair when Starn and Huill made their first attack on Nagister Nornt . . .

"An artificial body I couldn't read?" Rob demanded in astonishment.

Yes. She recalled the one time she had seen that body, apparently bleeding from a dozen wounds but actually oozing red oil while it made its terrifying final assault on Nornt in his cavern hideaway. She had been pregnant with Billy then —Billy William Huill—and she had cowered until Nornt was frightened completely out of his mind and then she had shot him herself and what she thought was Starn was lying dead on the floor and . . .

"Stop!" grunted Rob. "You named your son after Huill?"

We call him Billy. Huill was such a good friend—for a telepath —and so brave . . . the way he died. He was a real chum, he and Starn at ease together, but Rob here always uncomfortable . . . wanting to be a chum but . . . That's why he went to Richhold with the defensemen that time! Huill had been killed, which left him a live coward with his brave friends gone. So he was trying to— make up for it! Maybe he still is!

"O.K.!" Rob rasped, his thin face showing red behind his beard. "So I know what fear is! I also have learned how to fight it, because a man does what he has to!"

"I'm sorry," murmured Cytherni.

"Never mind," Rob said in disgust. "You've turned Olsapern,

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that's for sure! I shouldn't expect anything better from the likes of you! What a man like Starn ever saw—" He strode angrily about the room in which he was interviewing her, trying to regain his composure.

Did he admire Starn so much? Cytherni wondered in surprise. She had never suspected it. But that would help explain . . .

"Look!" Rob yelped. "What about these theories of Starn's, and what's he up to?"

How was she supposed to answer that? She understood Starn's work about as well as he did her art—which wasn't much. Did Starn view her work with the same kind of fond but uninterested indulgence with which she viewed his? Let's see . . . His main idea was that the Packs and the Olsaperns each had a segment of the truth, but to get anywhere they would have to put these segments together. But since they would not, he was working alone, trying to apply what he had learned of Olsapern science to understanding and extending the Novo senses. He was making some progress, especially when he worked with Billy's perception sense. They had discovered a large oil deposit and he tried last night to interest Higgins in it . . . Starn took disappointment awfully well. He took Higgins' rejection so good-naturedly last night, even though she knew how determined he was to get his work accepted.

"Are you sure you have the right understanding of what Starn's trying to do?" Rob demanded in disbelief.

Cytherni frowned. Well, she *thought* she understood it fairly well. A combining of science and the Novo senses . . .

"Sacrilege!" muttered Rob.

Cytherni blinked. She had never thought of it that way, but it was true. In the view of the Packs, the gifts of the Sacred Gene would be profaned by contact with the cursed evils of the Science Age. And for that matter, she realized, the Olsaperns' objections amounted to the same thing, except that they saw the positions of good and evil reversed.

Thank heavens she hadn't let Starn land the flier here to pick her up! Not that his old friends in Pack Foser would have . . . have *harmed* him, but they would have made their condemnation plain. And luckily it was she, not he, who had fallen from the flier.

"Starn's changed in more ways than one," Rob commented sadly. "The man who was our Raid Leader would never have let his wife do the more dangerous of two tasks."

What did Rob mean by that? Oh, yes. Starn piloting the flier while she pushed the packs out the hatch. Well, she was on her feet, having got up to bring Billy his breakfast, and Starn was the better pilot, and she wanted to make sure

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the right pack was dropped at the right Compound, and . . .

Bob was shaking his head. "You don't think he's changed," he said, "but that still doesn't sound like Starn to me."

On second thought, it didn't sound like Starn to her, either. But . . . well, people are complicated. They don't stay in what we think is their character all the time. So this morning Starn's chivalry had slipped a little. Perhaps he was quietly annoyed with her for getting them involved in such a silly adventure—

"Then this trip was your idea?" asked Rob.

Yes . . . or . . . well . . . Starn had put the idea into actual words first, but he was just going along with her desire to get the portraits of Billy to the grandparents.

"You *think* he was just going along with your wishes," Rob corrected her. "You don't *know* that."

You crummy, prying telepaths do the knowing.

"And knowing's not the supreme pleasure you think it is," Rob commented sourly. He paused, either to think or to communicate with someone outside, then said, "If you don't understand Starn's work, you probably don't understand Olsapern science. You know some of the things it can do, but not how."

Yes. Starn understands it better, but he complains about how little he really comprehends. But Billy, starting as a child, will learn it all. All I know is the products—menergy, artificial bodies and new bodies, fliers, power sources the size of peas that last for years, beautiful houses and clothing and . . . *What am I doing to you!*

Rob grunted. "What we're learning isn't hurting us! Don't be afraid of that! Knowledge of Olsapern science won't shock us into primitivism like they claim. How is it the Olsaperns I've seen—the trading-post men, the flier pilots and defensemen—don't know about all this?"

Because they're not the bright ones. They don't care to learn, so they're not taught much. They're the only ones allowed in reading distance of Pack men. What they know won't hurt you.

Rob chuckled caustically. "Or won't let us learn anything that could hurt the Olsaperns! What a pack of idiots!" He prowled restlessly about the room for a moment, then added, "But perhaps more dangerous, and less idiotic, than their dull-witted front men led us to believe. Unwittingly, Cytherni, you've done the Packs a great service today. We've been underestimating the power of the evil forces in the world. We know those forces better now, and can deal with them accordingly." He hesitated for several seconds before saying, "If the other Packs share the views of the men of Foser, there will be no more trading with—or raiding of—the Olsa-

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pern trading posts, for one thing. No further association at all."

"But the Olsaperns want friendship eventually," Cytherni protested aloud. "They want the peoples to come together!"

"Not while Pack men have their Novo senses, they don't," Rob contradicted.

This, Cytherni had to admit, was true. Obviously, her unplanned visit to Foser Compound had done more damage to Pack-Olsapern relations than could be repaired in a dozen generations. Every thought that passed through her head only seemed to make matters worse. She had to get out of Pack country!

"A flier landed several minutes ago, to dicker for your release," Rob informed her. "But I don't know if we'll let them have you. It's true you're more Olsapern than Pack woman now, but perhaps you're not beyond rehabilitation. Perhaps you can still be reclaimed for some worthy purpose of the Sacred Gene. Why haven't you and Starn had any children since Billy? Were you Treated?"

No. We could have children but . . . but—

"You're not sure of the answer," said Rob. "Maybe it was Starn's doing."

No. Why? Birth control is so simple there that . . . No, that's not it. I used to *want* children, but then I didn't. Yes, I did, too, but I didn't want Starn to feel confined by a large family—

"Starn wanted children, too," said Rob. He studied her intently, attempting to ferret out thoughts that had never been fully conscious with her. At last he asked, "Did you feel, perhaps, that Starn was not ready to settle down to family life, that his work or something would require him, sooner or later, to take action that would be made more difficult for him by a large family?"

That sounded almost right. "I felt that he wasn't quite . . . domesticated," she said slowly.

Rob frowned and grunted. "I think maybe you were right. I'm having those Olsapern defensemen invited in. They won't know much, but maybe I can learn something from just what they don't know."

Let me go home with them. Please. I belong with Starn and Billy.

Rob shrugged impatiently and said nothing.

When the two defensemen were brought in a few minutes later, one was carrying an audiovisual transceiver equipped with droplegs. On its screen was the face of Higgins. Cytherni was relieved to see this trusted friend taking a personal hand in obtaining her release.

Rob ignored the transceiver, and snapped a question at the defensemen. "Where's the flier she fell from?"

The Olsaperns looked startled and remained silent.

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"I suggest you direct your questions at me, Foser," Higgins' cross voice came from the speaker. "I'm—"

"I know who you are, Higgins," said Rob coldly. "I'll talk to you, but let it be understood that I take your failure to come dicker in person as an admission of your inferiority. We have Cytherni's knowledge now, so your old alibi of shielding us from damaging information no longer holds up. From now on you'll have to admit to yourselves that you're avoiding contact with us out of fear."

"Think what you please, Foser," retorted Higgins. "I'm not parleying with you to argue that matter, but to obtain the return of Cytherni. I assume you know my offer—two special shipments of tropical fruits per winter to Foser Compound for a period of fifteen years, with the . . ."

"Your offer is rejected," said Rob. "The Pack's conditions for the release of Cytherni is that she will be exchanged for her son Huill—Billy to you—when and if you capture Starn and the boy."

"Capture?" demanded Higgins innocently.

"Don't play games, Higgins!" Rob growled. "Don't try to pretend that Starn came dashing back to you for help after Cytherni fell out of the flier! That's what Starn led her to believe he'd do, but I don't buy it! Now, my deal is this: You catch Starn and the boy, turn the boy over to the Pack, with which he belongs, and Cytherni can either go or stay as she wishes. The boy is only six, and has the Novo sense of a Pack man. Even if his parents have turned Olsapern it's not too late to save him. That's the deal, Higgins. The only deal I'm offering."

Higgins' face stared threateningly for a moment before he grated, "Cytherni's misadventure has lifted the lid in more ways than one, Foser! We can recover her, whether you like it or not. We can flood Foser Compound with a sleep gas, for instance, that will knock all of you out. Our men could then safely remove Cytherni and, as an object lesson, sterilize every man, woman and child in the Pack!"

Rob laughed at him. "I imagine you could do that, Higgins, but I don't imagine you will. Not while Starn is on the loose you won't! You want Cytherni back, but that's not your primary objective. What damage she could do you was done during the first half hour after she landed. Except as bait for Starn, she's no longer important enough to warrant drastic action. And since Starn dumped her here, you can't really be sure she's attractive bait!"

"I wasn't dumped!" cried Cytherni, dismayed by the implications of the word, and by Rob's stubbornness. "I fell!"

Rob turned to her and said in a more gentle tone than he had

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used before, "You were dumped, Cytherni. I'm sorry, but that's the way it was. Starn's flier didn't just happen to hit an air pocket, in the middle of a smooth flight, at the precise instant when you were hanging out the hatch. And it didn't just happen that you were unloading the chute packs instead of him. Or that he proposed starting the trip at an hour when Billy would have to be taken along. Or that Higgins isn't disputing my statement that Starn hasn't returned." He glanced at Higgins and said, "Cytherni believes this whole trip was her doing, not Starn's. There were some portraits of the boy she wanted delivered to the grandparents, you know. If you had agreed to deliver them last night, you would have wrecked Starn's scheme."

Higgins cursed angrily. "Why didn't *you* ask me to do it, Cytherni?" he demanded. "I'd have found a way. But Starn had me annoyed over one of his ridiculous arguments, and . . . well, when *he* asked me, I turned him down."

"Maybe he had that figured, too," said Rob.

Higgins glared at him. "There's a clever brain in that throw-back skull of yours, Foser. Maybe you can figure out what Starn's purpose is in all this, since you're so smart."

Rob shrugged. "Isn't that obvious to you, Higgins? He's continuing his work in isolation, where neither you, nor I, nor Cytherni can stop him! One thing I can agree with you about, Higgins, is that Starn is engaged in an evil pursuit. He's a bigger threat to the safety of the world than Nagister Nornt could've ever become!"

His voice grew wrathful as he continued, "But you, Higgins, are the guilty party in all this! Starn was a fine man, one who would have been long honored in the legends of Pack Foser, until you subverted him! You made him the madman he is today, a man with a freakish mind that is neither Pack nor Olsapern! That's what comes from an unnatural mingling between Pack men and Olsaperns! And that's why we will have no future associations with you, once this matter is ended. You may as well close down your stupid trading posts, Higgins. We won't even bother to raid them hereafter!"

After a frigid silence, Higgins said formally, "Your proposal to exchange Cytherni for the boy Billy will be discussed in our council, Foser. You will be advised of our decision. Let's go, men!"

The defensemen took the transceiver and marched out of the room.

"But . . ." murmured Cytherni, "if Starn did that, why didn't he take me along?"

Rob did not seem to hear her for a moment, but sat with a distracted look. At last he roused himself and looked at her. "Because

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your attitudes are pretty typically Olsapern. You disapprove his work, although you try not to. In fact, you're jealous of his work, which has kept him from being the kind of man you want for a father of the children you haven't had."

"Oh," gulped Cytherni in a small voice. Then she turned and ran from the room, in search of some spot where her grief could be suffered in a semblance of privacy—though she knew there was no privacy to be had in Foser Compound.

Four days passed before an Olsapern flier again landed near the Compound. Once more the transceiver was brought into Rob's quarters, and Cytherni was invited to attend the parley.

Rob gave the image of Higgins a hard look and demanded, "Well?"

"The council has considered your proposal," Higgins said, "and while we don't like it we are willing to accept your terms."

"All right. Bring us the boy."

"The problem is," Higgins continued uncomfortably, "that we haven't yet located Starn and Billy. We know, in general, where they are, but that is a mountainous area of sizable extent, a strip two hundred and fifty miles long and we would estimate twenty miles wide."

"The offer," said Rob, "was for you to turn the boy over after he and his father were captured. If you haven't caught them yet, what are we talking about?"

"As you remarked yourself at our last meeting," said Higgins, "Starn is a grave threat to the safety of the world—to your people as well as our own. I agree with that, and as for my own role in making him the danger he is, well, let me assure you that this strengthens my resolve to compensate for past errors. However, the crucial fact is that we have not found him, and he *must* be found! Under the circumstances, we think a cooperative effort, a joint search, is justified."

Rob lifted an eyebrow. "Do I detect a more worried tone in your voice, Higgins? Perhaps you've checked that oil deposit Starn and Billy mapped. Was oil there?"

Higgins' mouth tightened. "The map was accurate," he admitted.

"Anything else to shake you up?" asked Rob.

"Well . . . yes. We have means of locating lost persons, small tracking devices implanted in the body. In some manner, Starn found where these implants were in himself and his wife and son. Minutes before leaving, he put them out of action, probably with a focused ultrasonic beam. Those implants are small, and made intentionally hard to locate. Starn once returned to Foser Compound with such implants in him. Did any of your people know they were there?"

"No. I remember the time of which you speak," said Rob. "With these tracker devices not working,

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then, you have no way of locating Starn and Billy?"

"That's correct. The devices on his flier were not disturbed, however, and we have a plot of its course from the time it took off until it came down and sank in the ocean some nine hours later."

"Oh!" moaned Cytherni.

"But Starn and Billy chuted out long before then. Unfortunately, we cannot pinpoint the time they did so much closer than ten minutes, which leaves us with a considerable stretch of the flier's course to search. And we assume that Starn would not hike, with the boy, more than ten miles east or west, probably not that much.

"Anyway, he's already had four days for whatever it is he's doing. And I'll admit, Foser, that I'm now more convinced that he is . . . on the track of something that could be most unsettling to us all. If you're really convinced of your own statement that he is a serious threat, you must help us find him."

"That sort of entanglement with you," glowered Rob, "is exactly what we are determined to avoid."

"The feeling is mutual," flared Higgins, "but this is a task that has to be done!"

Rob said slowly, "I don't know just how we could help you, anyway. What did you have in mind?"

"We comb the territory with fliers, as we've been doing, but this time with one or more of your telepaths aboard each craft to detect Starn's mind when a flier comes in range."

Rob shook his head. "I guessed it was something like that. It won't work. The rub would be to come in range. And stay there long enough for a telepath to pick up and even start to identify Starn's thoughts. Keep in mind that maximum telepathic range is half a mile, and in the High Mountains, which I presume are the ones you're talking about, there are valleys over a quarter of a mile below the ridges. You couldn't cover the area so thoroughly as to be sure a flier would pass directly over Starn; each telepath would have to scan a strip of, say, a quarter of a mile on each side of the flier. The air can be rough over mountains, can't it? So your fliers would have to stay a couple of hundred feet above the ridgetops if they move with any speed at all.

"Maybe you've taken all that into account, all except the time it takes a telepath to detect a mind. It isn't instantaneous, Higgins. And it isn't certain. The detected mind has to be thinking thoughts the telepath can readily distinguish from his own. If Starn and the boy were down in a valley, they would be within extreme telepathic range of a flier passing low above the ridges for a very few seconds, unless the flier was moving extremely slow. So, unless you've got enough fliers,

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and we can round up enough telepaths, to creep through those mountains at treetop level, following the terrain up and down, we would have to be plain lucky to find Starn by that method. You could probably do as well with your infrared detectors as with our telepaths."

"You're sure of that?" asked Higgins.

"Yes." Rob frowned and added, "I've given some thought to a joint search myself since we last talked, because I guessed you wouldn't find Starn."

"Well, if my plan won't work, what will?" Higgins demanded.

"I'm not sure. We've got to remember that Starn's too much of a hunter not to know all the tricks of the hunted." Rob's eyes studied Cytherni. "There's one possibility I can think of, but that involves the active assistance of Starn's wife, and she isn't in a helpful frame of mind."

"Oh? How are you, Cytherni?" asked Higgins.

"Very well, thank you," she said.

"Why won't you help us bring Starn back to you, dear?" asked Higgins.

Rob laughed dryly. "Sweet talk will get you nowhere," he said. "Cytherni's torn up by all this, and blames herself for what she thinks was a disloyal attitude toward her husband's work. Anyhow, she's determined to be on his side from now on."

"And she could help us, if she would?" Higgins asked.

"Yes. It's . . . it's rather complicated to explain to somebody who doesn't understand the Novo senses. But there is an emotional tie between parent and child, Higgins, that stays intact even when they're miles apart. It's something quite different from telepathy, and only serves as a line of communication in moments of great stress. But there are some of us who can help others use this linkage. That's the way we locate lost children who have wandered or have been carried out of telepathic range.

"But for it to work, the parent must actively desire the recovery of the child. In our case, Cytherni refuses to cooperate. She is willing to leave the boy with Starn."

"Well, I'm glad you're a reasonable enough man, Foser, to consider cooperation, even if Cytherni is not. Perhaps we can think of some other approach, if your people share your viewpoint."

"They do."

"Good. I'll leave these men and their flier near your Compound, if that meets your approval, while all of us give this matter more thought. I suggest that you try to convince Cytherni to help us, Foser, since she offers the only prospect we know of right now."

"That won't be easy," grumbled Rob.

The next day Rob sent for Cytherni.

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"I'm not going to try to talk you into anything," he said, "but I want you to know of a thought that has come to me. You asked the other day why Starn left you here, and I said because you oppose him. That wasn't a very satisfactory, or true, answer, I realize now. You have your doubts about his work, but you are his wife, and in a pinch you would stand with him. You've been proving that. What's more, I think Starn would have known it all along.

"Then why did he leave you here? A number of us have been thinking about that, Cytherni, people who knew Starn well in the old days, and understand the kind of person he is, and how grim he can be when he's determined to do something.

"We've thought about it at length," he said, watching her face, "and the conclusion we've reached is more disturbing than anything else in this whole affair. He dumped you here, Cytherni, *because his plans involve something you couldn't possibly approve.* Something you would have to fight to prevent, even against your own husband.

"As to what that could be—well, Billy is the subject in Starn's experiments, the only subject with a strong Novo sense available to him. Now I'm sure Starn wouldn't do anything which he was convinced would be harmful to the boy, but he must have had something in mind that would be risky, at least. He's working in unexplored fields, where nobody knows what is and is not dangerous. So—"

"Stop it!" cried Cytherni, a wild look in her eyes. Rob's mouth twisted in an unhappy little smile of victory. He rose and led her across the Compound to the hut of Virnce, Starn's father, where the Pack's finder, an old man named Harnk, joined them very quickly.

"She's ready?" Harnk asked.

Rob nodded. "She's ready."

Harnk pointed to the paint-sculptured portait of Billy. "Look at that," he told Cytherni. "You want to find your son? Yes . . . yes . . . indeed you do." He was silent for a moment, then looked up at Rob. "I need pen and paper."

Virnce produced the writing equipment and Harnk began sketching. "This is the aspect of a mountainside which catches the morning light. The boy can see it across a narrow valley. See how the rocks tilt in this double row of cliffs. The trees cover everything else. He sees a crestline that humps here and here, and dips here. He is sitting—or will be sitting when you find him—on a rock by a tent of Olsapern stuff, tall trees all around. The tent must be straight across the valley from this point on the mountain."

"Excellent, Harnk!" Rob applauded, looking over the old man's shoulder at the scrawly sketch.

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"Good work! Now, where's the mountain?"

Harnk shook his head. "I get no other impressions," he said.

Rob grunted in disappointment. "It's somewhere in the High Mountains, but you have no idea where?"

"No."

"Then how are we supposed to find the boy?"

Harnk lifted his shoulders. "Find the mountain, and the boy will be there."

"Yeah, find the mountain," parroted Rob in annoyance. "But who knows where a mountain that looks like that is located?"

Cytherni moved forward hesitantly and looked at the sketch. She did not recognize the mountain, of course, but its shape interested her as an artist. She recalled the massive triphoto geographical survey albums the Olsaperns had developed over the years, and which she had examined as part of her preparation to do landscapes. Probably the very mountainside Harnk had sketched was included in those albums.

Rob sighed. "I'd hoped we could handle this without the Olsaperns," he said, "but we'll need flier transportation, anyway. Somebody go tell the defensemen to bring the Higgins box in again."

IV

"When are we going hunting, Daddy?" asked Billy.

"This afternoon," Starn replied. It was the day after they had chuted from the flier. Starn was relaxing in a folding chair while the boy played around the camp. He grinned at his son. "For someone who put in a hard day yesterday, you're awfully eager to start chasing coons."

"Oh, you did most of the work," Billy replied. "Are you tired today?"

"No, I'm just thinking."

"Oh. What about?"

"How to make your perception work better."

"It works good now, Daddy, with the needle rods. Can I take them along when we go hunting? I think I can find a coon with them. What does a coon look like?"

Starn described the raccoon's appearance, and asked, "Does knowing what a coon looks like help you percept it?"

The boy thought about this before shaking his head. "I don't think so. But that'll let me know what I've found when I've found one." Starn chuckled, and the boy said, "While you're thinking, let me take the needle rods and practice. Maybe there's a coon close by."

"O.K., but don't go far." Starn had misgivings about letting Billy out of sight in such wild country, but memories of himself running loose at the boy's age kept him from being too restrictive during outings such as this.

He settled back into his chair,

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and his brow creased in a concentrated effort to think the problem out.

The trouble was that his unconscious just wasn't producing. Despite his reading of everything in Olsapern literature that pertained even slightly to the Novo senses, and his own numerous experiments with Billy and himself, his unconscious still seemed to lack the clues necessary to produce that sudden burst of insight. This meant that he was missing some basic point, he guessed, some key concept that had to be fed to his unconscious before the problem would be solvable. What was it?

About an hour later Billy returned, a little winded from climbing about the steep mountainside. "I didn't find a coon," he reported, "but I found two chipmunks. The needle rod works good for animals, even when I stand still and don't move it."

Starn nodded. Perception worked only in the presence of motion. The object could be moving, or the perceptor, or the percepting device in the perceptor's hands. The more motion the better. Probably that was why dowsing rods had traditionally been used more often to find underground water than for any other purpose. The water was moving, the dowser was walking more often than not, and when water was detected the rods moved.

But this was a line of thought Starn had pursued often before, to no new conclusion. Motion might be basic to perception, but it didn't seem to be—at least not in any gross form—to the other Novo senses. That made it unlikely to offer the opening he seemed to need.

Billy got a drink of water, puttered about the camp for a few minutes, and sat down at last by Starn's chair.

"Can I help think, Daddy?" he asked.

"Maybe so, son," Starn smiled. "I could certainly use some help."

Billy nodded gravely, and wrinkled his brow in imitation of his father. But in short order he looked up to complain, "I have to know how percepting works before I can think about it."

"If I knew how it worked—" Starn began. He stopped and began trying to explain. "Perception is a sense, Billy, like seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling. But not everybody has perception. That's the main reason it's called a Novo sense. There are others like it, such as being able to know what somebody else is thinking, called telepathy, or to know things that haven't happened yet, which is premonating.

"Now, people have all sorts of contrivances to extend their ability to see and hear—telescopes, microscopes, sound amplifiers, radios, infrared viewers, and so on. They have done less with smell, taste,

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and touch. They have made mechanical feelers that can tell a lot more about the feel of something than you could with your fingers, but these machines report their findings to our eyes and ears, so they're extensions of our sense of touch only indirectly. As for smell and taste, what they do with those is mostly to control what we smell and taste, to give us the ones we like and get rid of the ones we don't like.

"What I want to do is find ways to extend the Novo senses, the way telescopes and radios extend seeing and hearing. That's what the dowsing machine with the needle rods does for perception, but it doesn't do it very well. I want something much better than that."

Billy was silent for a while after Starn finished. Then he asked, "How do the regular senses work, Daddy?"

Hiding a touch of impatience, Starn said, "Well, there are thousands of tiny nerve ends at the back of our eyeballs, and in our ears, and in our skin. When we open our eyes, light reflected from the things around us goes in and excites our eye nerves in different ways, and this pattern of excitements go to our brain which interprets them as an image of whatever we're looking at. Or a sound we hear is a vibration of the air in our ears, which makes little membranes and bones vibrate, too, and the ear nerves take the message of those vibrations to the brain. Or when we press a finger against something, like this piece of bark, for example, the nerves in our skin are excited, and the pattern of excitements tells the brain if we're feeling something smooth or rough, hard or soft, or cold or hot."

"That makes perception a lot like feeling and hearing," said Billy, "but not much like seeing, don't it?"

Starn blinked. "How is that?"

"Well, you got to move to touch something, or the air's got to move for you to hear something. But nothing has to move for you to see something."

"That's right," Starn grinned with amusement. "But seeing requires light, which is moving, although much too rapidly for you to be aware of it as motion. Light, like air vibrations, is energy, and all the senses, even smell and taste, need energy to make them work."

"Yeah, you need to breathe in the air to smell," agreed Billy wisely, "or put something in your mouth to taste it."

"I wasn't thinking of that, exactly," said Starn. "The food in your mouth and the smelly molecules in your nose have to undergo a chemical reaction with the liquid on your tongue or your nasal passage. They give up chemical energy to work your senses. In fact—"

Starn hesitated. It was not a new

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thought, exactly, that stopped him. It was an old one that had never come through to him quite so vividly before. "In fact," he repeated slowly, "it is energy, and not substance, that *all* our senses detect."

His mind was a whirl of activity. No wonder perception required motion, which was itself an aspect of energy. But what about telepathy? Brainwaves? Energy in the electromagnetic spectrum? That was hardly likely, or the Olsaperns would have devised a means of telepathic jamming long ago. Even a flash of lightning would create telepathic static if that were the case, and lightning did no such thing.

Also, gross motion could not be the only energy involved in perception. The motion had to set up an energy *field* of some sort; otherwise the motion could not be percepted at a distance. Whether or not this field was the same kind of energy that powered telepathy he couldn't guess. It could be the same, or it could be as different as a light photon is from a sound vibration.

And what about the energy that premonating would require—an energy that went backward through time? Well, weren't some subatomic particles time-reversible? He seemed to recall reading that they were, but that was an area of science that he knew little about.

The trouble was, he thought with frustration, there was precious little he understood about any science at all. Take the medium Cytherni used for her paint-sculptures, for instance: menergy. He understood what it was only in a very general, and, therefore, highly uninformative, way. Matrices of "solid" energy, or self-containing energy.

And that, he had a hunch, was something he definitely *should* understand, because as he had finally realized, the key to the secret of the Novo senses was hidden in the concept of energy, which made that a subject he couldn't know too much about!

Billy had to repeat his question before Starn heard him.

"Where are the perception nerve ends, Daddy?"

"Huh?"

"The seeing nerve ends are in the eyeballs, and the feeling nerve ends are in the skin. Where are the perception nerve ends?"

"Oh. I don't know. Perhaps all through us. Or perhaps those nerves end inside the brain, with no external sense organs. Maybe that's the difference between Novo and regular senses."

In which case Novo energy would have to be of a kind that passed readily through flesh and bone, like a ghostly type of X ray.

Starn got up and went into the tent, where he rummaged around in the bottom of the chutepacks for several minutes before he found what he thought would be there

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somewhere. A pack of collapsed menergy matrices, of the small size used by Cytherni for quick outdoor sketches. He took one out and activated it, watching and feeling the way it expanded in his hand from a tiny gray wafer to a clearly transparent, slightly shimmering cube with eight-inch sides. Inside, near the center, he could see the pea-sized black sphere that powered the matrix.

An eight-inch cube of energy . . . but what *kind* of energy? Starn's comprehension stopped far short of the answer to that. "Pure energy," one of the Olsaperns had told him, but what did "pure" mean when applied to energy? Wasn't light pure? Or relative motion? Obviously "pure" in this context had a specialized meaning that was a mystery to him.

Still carrying the menergy matrix, he went back to his chair. "Did you get an idea, Daddy?" Billy asked.

"Maybe the start of one. Let's let it rest a while and see. Right now, how about some lunch, then I'll show you how to handle a gun, and we'll do a little hunting."

"Oh, boy!" Billy exclaimed.

The next day Starn had enough tentative ideas to try some experiments. They were failures. Working from the analogy between ancient crystal-radio receivers versus powered electron-tube receivers—which had the advantage of being understandable to him—he tried to apply power to his dowsing machine circuit. The hope was to amplify the output, thus extending the device's range.

Not that he hadn't tried that before, but previously he had tried to energize the circuit with electricity. This time, working on the assumption that there might be something truly fundamental about the "pure" energy of a menergy matrix, he used a matrix as his power source. He tried every circuit arrangement he could imagine. Using techniques he had learned from watching his wife work, he even built a needle rod device completely inside a matrix, hoping to saturate it with the energy present there. It worked no better or worse than before.

He had to conclude that he was going about his job the wrong way. His device was *not* a detector like a radio receiver; the detector system was within the human perceptor. That, he realized with annoyance, should have been clear to him all along. The needle rod device was . . . well, an auxiliary device, an extension of the human "antenna" perhaps, plus a visual read-out unit. Or maybe it was analogous to a tuning coil. Or perhaps a tuned antenna.

There was a thought! If it were a tuning device, perhaps something very like it could be used to "tune" energy, not for itself but for the central perception circuitry in the human brain!

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Billy's restlessness and his own uncertainty of how to proceed caused him to put off further tests until the next day, and to go exploring with the boy. This was something he had to do, anyway, to familiarize himself quite thoroughly with the neighboring terrain. If, by some chance, the Olsaperns and/or the Pack men located him sooner than his scheme called for, he would have to know every possible route of escape from his camp area.

That night as he and Billy ate supper, the boy asked, "How long are we going to camp, Daddy?"

"I'm not sure," said Starn. Realizing that this was an insufficient answer he added, "You see, Billy, we're playing a game like hide-and-seek with Higgins, and with my old friends in Pack Foser. So we have to stay hidden until some of them find us. I don't know how long that will take."

"Oh," said Billy, obviously pleased to be playing a game with grown-ups, and as his father's teammate. "Do you guess they're hunting us right now?"

Starn smiled. "I'm quite sure they are, son," he said, "quite sure, indeed."

But, he wondered silently, are they hunting together or separately?

When he woke the following morning the solution was waiting for him. It unfolded in his conscious, rough-hewn to be sure, but complete. And as one often does when a simple answer finally dawns, he wondered why he had missed it before.

As soon as breakfast was over and Billy was off in pursuit of whatever mountain fauna he could scare up, Starn got to work again. Energy *could* be tuned to supplement that normally available to the perceptive circuitry in the human nervous system! The needle rod device could do it. His trouble before was that he had been trying to go in the wrong direction. The device was essentially a . . . not a filter, exactly, but something like that. The Olsaperns would have a proper descriptive word for it, but Starn was less interested in words than results. A filter took out what was not wanted, but his device catalyzed what was not wanted into what was.

What he had to do was surround an energy source with this pseudo-filtering effect. The job was a tricky one for his amateur hands. It involved reshaping a cubical, leak-proof menergy matrix into one that was spherical and, therefore, thoroughly leaky, and enclosing the sphere with his pseudofilter. Actually, the effective circuitry surrounded not the sphere but the small central power source, and that made the fabrication process much simpler.

An hour of painstaking effort produced a carefully trimmed wa-

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fer of unactivated menergy with a knot of microlek components at its center, with two raw-ended wires trailing away from the knot. Starn took a deep breath, stood back, and touched the wire ends together.

The sphere expanded to a nine-inch diameter, glittering with escaping energy, then over a period of seconds dimmed and shrunk to the size of a tennis ball. As it did so a soundless "noise" poured into Starn's brain, a noise that made him whirl and crouch reflexively, alert for whatever monstrous danger was creeping up behind him.

In his alarm, he dropped the wires and their ends fell apart. The tennis ball collapsed into a wafer, the noise vanished, and with it the monstrous danger.

A bearlike bellow of protest came dimly to his ears from some distance away. Closer at hand he heard Billy's alarmed screech, *"Daddy!"*

Starn galloped down the mountain slope in the boy's direction, filled with puzzled concern. If his experiment had harmed the boy he . . . !

Billy came in sight legging it hard toward the camp. He slowed when he saw his father and his fright diminished. "There was an *awful* loud noise, Daddy!" he exclaimed, wide-eyed. "Do you know what made it?"

"I made it, son, with a gadget I was working on. Did it hurt you?"

"No, I guess it didn't," said Billy. "It just scared me. A little bit. It was such a funny kind of noise."

Starn took the boy's hand and walked back toward the camp. "You mean it wasn't a noise you heard, but one you percepted?"

"That's right!" said the boy. "It was like . . . like perception-stuff was packed tight all around me, and making an awful racket! Gosh, you made a gadget that really works, this time, Daddy!"

Starn nodded slowly. "Looks like I did at that, son. But it doesn't work the way I meant it to."

"What was it supposed to do?"

"It was supposed to be a . . . a kind of light for perception, to let your perception see better. But instead of lighting up things, it shined in your eyes instead, and blinded you."

"You don't *see* when you percept, you *hear,* kind of," the boy objected. "But it did make a kind of light, too. But the light wasn't as much as the noise."

Noise *and* light? Starn considered this. Telepaths always spoke of "reading" thoughts, as if the process were related to seeing. And for Billy, with perhaps an unusably weak telepathic sense, the gadget had made a light that was, to him, minor compared to the noise. Probably a telepath would have experienced a blinding flash of "light" accompanied by a slight noise.

But it was not strange for an energy source to produce signals that reached more than one sense. A

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dynamite explosion, for instance, was quite evident to ears and eyes—and if close enough it could also be smelled, tasted and felt! Quite possibly, then, the gadget was an undiscriminating transmitter of Novo energy. Just how it could be used, and what effect it would have on the Novo senses . . .

Careful to hide his sudden worry, Starn said, "What can you find with your needle rods here, Billy?"

The boy got the sensor unit out of his pocket and held it in front of him as they trudged up the mountainside. He watched it a moment, then slapped it against the palm of his other hand. "It's stopped working, Daddy. It don't show anything at all."

"What can you percept without it?"

After a moment of concentration, Billy replied in consternation: "Nothing. Nothing at all!"

Starn nodded grimly. "I'm afraid that noise deafened your perception, Billy," he said.

The boy's face puckered. "Forever?" he asked after a moment.

"We can hope not. We'll have to wait and see."

Lunch was a sober affair for both of them. Afterward Starn sat in his chair, glumly puzzling over what had happened to Billy, and why. The boy stretched out on the dead leaves where a spot of sunlight came through the trees and was soon napping.

An hour and a half later he sat up suddenly. "Daddy, I can percept again! Just as good as ever!"

Starn heaved a mighty sigh of relief and grinned.

"That's fine, son, just fine!"

The boy went to the water jug and drank thirstily. "What are you going to try now?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Starn. "That gadget proved that this is too risky to fool with."

"Aw," said Billy. "It wasn't that bad! It was like looking at a bright light, and then looking at something else and not being able to see it right off. But it went away in a little while!"

"Yes," said Starn, "but if a person looks directly at the sun too often, or too long, he can blind himself permanently."

Billy thought this over. "Could you make the noise dimmer, so it wouldn't hurt? Or maybe aim it so it would hit what I was trying to percept instead of hitting me?"

"I've been trying to think of a way to shield it into specific directions," replied Starn, "but I don't believe it can be shielded. Once this energy is generated, there's no stopping it."

"But do you have to generate it every which way?" asked Billy insistently.

"I don't know," replied Starn, eyeing the boy curiously. "You seem awfully eager about this," he remarked.

"Gosh, yes!" exclaimed Billy. "If

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you could make something that would percept for miles and miles, through mountains and everything, that'd be the best thing you've *ever* made for me! It would be a lot of fun!"

A toy! That's what it would be to Billy. What would it be to others? *If* others unbent from their prejudices sufficiently to accept it? To Higgins, a way to find needed oil and other resources, or a means of spying on the Pack men. To the Pack men, a weapon to be used in their feuds with each other, and perhaps against Olsaperns.

Certainly as a weapon against anyone employing a Novo sense. In fact, the transmitter Starn had already made was that. Whatever else he did, he decided he would produce a supply of such transmitters before nightfall, and keep them handy just in case.

But a Novo energy transmitter that could be aimed at the thing to be sensed, without overloading the mind's sensors with a flood of energy . . . The only way was to create a directional radiation of the energy at the beginning, instead of attempting to provide directional shielding after it was created. And the amount of energy should be far less than the transmitter had produced. The spherical menergy matrix leaked entirely too much . . .

And there was the answer, of course, neatly packaged for him by Olsapern technology, which was as it should be. The cubical matrix leaked no energy at all. So all he had to do, really, was make another transmitter like the first, but housed in a matrix flat on five faces and bulging only the slightest amount on the sixth. Only as the energy leaked away from the matrix was it converted into the medium that impinged on the Novo senses, and it would leak away in one direction only, from the one bulged face of the cube.

"All right, Billy," said Starn, "I'll have another go at it."

The boy wandered off to a nearby spring while Starn worked. The beam was finished before he returned. Starn aimed it straight up as he activated the matrix, which in appearance at least was little different from those into which Cytherni injected paint. The curvature of the bulged side was too slight to be visible, and the energy escapage was too minor to gray it noticeably. It differed from the other sides only in appearing to be covered with a light film.

Holding his breath, Starn aimed the Novo beam at himself. A sound? Yes, perhaps, it could be called that. It was barely noticeable. The sense was definitely there, though, that something was creeping up behind him. It was less powerful than the real thing. Perhaps with the beam generator at an appreciable distance, the effect would not come through at all.

He pointed the beam in front of

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him and slowly turned around. It was as if he had been blind all his life and someone had suddenly supplied him with eyes. There was Billy down by the spring. Does he know the beam is on him? Apparently not. *Hey, Billy, what are you doing?* That made him jump! He's looking up here and grinning. Now he's coming this way.

Starn continued to turn. There's a family of bears, over on the next mountain. One roared this morning. Minerals? Yes, but I don't know how to identify them from what I sense.

"Let me try it, Daddy," pleaded Billy, dashing up panting.

Starn handed it over with the admonition, "You will probably be able to reach farther than I can with it, son. If you reach any people, don't call to them, or you'll give our presence here away, and we're still in that hide-and-seek game."

"All right, Daddy." The boy seized the beam and began avidly studying his surroundings, exclaiming excitedly over the results. Starn stood watching, feeling that supreme exaltation that comes only in a moment of high discovery.

"Hey, there's Mommy!" yelled Billy.

"What? Where?"

"She's at Foser Compound. That's hundreds of miles away! But it's her all right."

"What is she doing?" asked Starn, feeling a pang of guilt.

"Nothing much. Just sitting around. I think she's mad at somebody, but I can't tell why." He held the beam steady for several seconds before moving on around. Starn, momentarily distraught by his regrets concerning Cythreni, was not aware of Billy swinging the beam toward him until his danger sense alerted him. He jumped.

Billy had lowered the beam and was staring at him in hurt surprise. "Gosh, Daddy! If you flipped her out of the flier, no wonder she's mad!"

After a stunned moment, Starn asked, "Did you see that in my mind?"

"I guess so," said Billy. "It was there when I pointed the beam at you."

"Don't point it at me again while we're here, son," said Starn. "Did you see that I didn't really want to do that to your mother?"

"Yes. You didn't want to but you had to, but you didn't think why."

"Good. I don't want you to know why just yet, Billy. If you know I regret that I—"

"It's all right, Daddy. I'm not mad or anything. And maybe Mommy's mad about something else. She's so far away that all I could tell was that she was mad."

Starn nodded, greatly relieved at the way Billy was taking his discovery. "What do you say we quit working and go exploring?" he asked.

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"Hot dog!" Billy shouted, and thoughts of his angry mother were forgotten.

But every few hours after that, Billy would reactivate the beam and aim at northeast for a few minutes, to see what his mother was doing. Starn was glad he did, because Billy reported on what he saw and, in a way, kept Starn in touch with his wife.

It was two days later before Billy reported anything unusual. "She's awful worried and scared," he said half tearfully. "She's running somewhere with somebody—Now she's looking at me! No, not at *me*, at one of her paint things of me! Gosh, I thought for a second there that I'd showed her—Now somebody else *is* looking at me, Daddy! He's an old man, kind of scrawny, and he's looking at Mommy and seeing me! He sees that mountain over there, and our tent, and me sitting on that big rock, but I'm not on the rock! How come he sees me like that?"

It took Starn a moment to figure out what was happening. "Old Harnk, the finder," he muttered. "I'd forgotten about him. We'll have to—" He stopped. What should he do now? This was an unexpected development that would destroy his scheme before it had a chance to bear fruit.

Obviously, he had to get away from the camp immediately—and leave Billy behind. With old Harnk in the picture, the boy would be found anywhere he went, and if he stayed with his father, then Starn could be found, too. That is, if—

"Are the Olsaperns going to help them come and get you?" he asked.

"I guess so. They're talking about it."

"Then they'll be here soon, Billy. Our game is half over. They've found you, but not me. You'll have to stay here and wait for them, and I'll go hide somewhere else." He began putting together a light pack, taking nothing but what he had to have, or didn't dare leave behind. "Did you watch me close enough, Billy, to see how I made the energy transmitter, or the beam?"

"No, I don't guess so. But, if you'll show me how, I'll remember it, all right."

Starn smiled. "No. It'll be more fun to make the Pack men and Olsaperns hunt me without knowing how to make such gadgets, and if you knew, the telepaths could find out from you."

Starn was careful to gather up all the needle rods, transmitters, and beam projectors he had made in his experiments and stuff them into his pack. "Sorry our camping trip has to end so quickly, son," he said to the glum-faced boy. "But they'll be here to get you in an hour or two, and then they'll take you to Mother. You'll like being with her again, won't you?"

The boy nodded.

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Starn strapped on the pack, then knelt and gave the boy a squeeze. "Give her my love, won't you?"

"O.K., Daddy."

Rising hurriedly, Starn strode away from the camp and Billy sat down on the big rock to wait.

V

The two fliers were manned by a mixture of Olsapern defensemen and Foser raiders. Men from both sides were lowered into the camp from the craft that hovered over the trees, while the other began circling in search of Starn's telepathic scent.

He had not been able to go far over such difficult terrain in so short a time. Soon they had him located. Both fliers hovered near the spot and the Pack men swarmed down the droplines.

Peering upward, Starn guessed that the Olsapern defensemen were, very wisely, being held in reserve. This kind of action was not their meat. He had to guard his thoughts carefully with so many telepaths within range . . . think only of the immediate problem of escape and nothing else.

He fitted an arrow to which a —*No! Don't think it!*—was tied into his bow and shot it high into the trunk of a large oak. When the arrow struck a glowing ball lit up, dangling from it. The ball dimmed, and a confusion of shouts arose from the Pack men.

Every one of the Foser raiders would doubtless be strongly Novo-sensed, he assumed. The transmitter would do more than blind their special senses; the flood of "static" would drive them half out of their wits. He took the opportunity to change his position and pass between his would-be captors.

The difficulty was that on board the fliers were instruments such as infrared detectors that would not be confused by the Novo transmitter. As long as he stayed near Foser raiders, who were now stumbling about aimlessly and almost drunkenly, the Olsapern instruments would probably be unable to single him out. But if he began moving away, the action would identify him. Not that the defensemen could expect to come down the droplines and capture him where the Pack men had failed, but they could kill him very easily, if they wished, without leaving the fliers.

He crouched out of sight in a bush-covered crevice for several minutes, listening to the raiders call to each other and thrash about, trying to get themselves organized. If it were only dark, he thought with annoyance, he could mingle freely with the Pack men, even join their search for him, and if they dispersed to scout the surrounding mountains he could get out of range of Olsapern instruments. But darkness was hours away. Long before that someone would succeed in silencing his transmitter. Novo

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senses would remain blinded for a while, but with the static stopped the raiders would be less confused and—

Another sound joined the voices of the Pack men. It was distant but coming closer: the growls of bears, sounding extremely annoyed over something. The big animals had made themselves scarce in the vicinity of his camp, their old and well-learned distrust of man augmented by the barkings of his and Billy's rifles when they went hunting. Only once during their stay had Starn even heard a bear, and that one in the distance just after he had briefly activated his first Novo energy transmitter.

And that had been a roar of protest!

Whether or not bears were Novo-sensed was a question for later investigation. But obviously there was something about the radiations from a Novo transmitter that bothered them, and bothered them bad! Right now they were heading toward the scene of the search from several directions, with the evident intent of laying heavy paws on the source of those irksome energies.

"Bears!" a Foser man bellowed. More yells followed, then rifle shots, and roars of pain from wounded animals. Starn eased out of hiding in time to see a large female bear, dripping blood from a flesh wound in her flank, retreating in his direction. He stepped aside and behind a tree to let her lumber past.

What annoyance the transmitter caused the animals was not enough to make them brave a barrage of rifle fire. They were leaving the scene, and scattering.

Starn joined them.

Relationships were strained at Foser Compound.

The Olsaperns were angry and suspicious over Starn's escape from the party of raiders. The Pack had Billy, under the agreement between Rob and Higgins, but the Olsaperns did not have Starn, who was to have been theirs. Therefore, they argued, the agreement was invalid, and Cytherni and the boy should be turned over to them.

And there was the embarrassing and somewhat dismaying fact that Starn's Novo "flare" had not only rendered the Foser raiders practically helpless; it had had similar if less drastic effects on a few of the Olsapern defensemen who had been in the fliers. Though the Olsaperns owned no usable Novo senses, it seemed hard to deny that some of them had the inherent ability for such senses.

Also, recriminations were harsh the next day, when it was realized that Starn's "flare" device should have been brought back for study, and a second visit to the mountain site discovered the flare was gone. There were claw marks on the tree in which it had been lodged, and

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the ground was covered with bear tracks. But except for a broken arrow, a few strands of wire, and the shredded remains of a de-energized menergy wafer, nothing was there to be found.

The strain was not eased by the Packs' failure to inform the Olsaperns of what they learned from Billy about the Novo energy beam device until after Higgins had figured out—from the fact that Starn had known to desert the camp and leave Billy behind—that the fugitive had devised some means of learning that the camp had been located.

"There is such a thing as good faith," his image glowered at Rob. "At least there is among civilized men. You have shown little evidence of good faith in this whole affair, Foser."

"Don't talk to me about honor, Olsapern!" the Pack chief snapped back. "You can't regard us as animals and still expect us to give you the respect due to equals! Certainly we're not fools enough to tell you anything about a weapon you would delight in using against us!"

"We have no intention of using *any* weapon against you!" stormed Higgins. "We never have! All we've ever done has been protect ourselves against your childish attacks —attacks that were aimed more often than not at posts we established solely to assist you!"

Rob replied coldly, "We've learned from Cytherni that Starn had a more likely explanation for your trading posts."

"You're citing Starn as an authority?" sneered Higgins. But never mind answering that. We're getting away from the basic point I'm trying to make, that we've never fought an aggressive battle with Pack men. On the record, you don't have the slightest excuse for withholding information about weapons developed by a man who is a danger to us all!"

"But on the other hand," retorted Rob, "I notice you are deadly afraid of letting any knowledge of Olsapern weapons fall in Pack hands. Not once has an engineer or a scientist come south of the Hard Line."

"Aren't we justified in that?" Higgins demanded. "Haven't we been given every reason to expect that better weapons would make the Packs bigger and bloodier nuisances?"

"Not if you would drop that silly attitude of superiority!" blared Rob. "Close down those insulting trading posts! Ask our permission when you want to dig a mine in Pack country! And when you have to deal with us at all, stop sending your village idiots as envoys! It's no skin off our noses if you don't follow the Sacred Gene; neither do the animals of the forest! We don't fight you because of religion, but because you're so despicable!"

Higgins looked startled. "That's a surprising revelation, if true."

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Rob was silent for a moment, then said, "The members of Pack Foser, as well as the travelers from other Packs who are here at the moment, agree that it is true. Although we have perhaps thought otherwise in the past."

"Very well," said Higgins. "If it's your price for cooperation in the present emergency, we'll be glad to withdraw our trading posts and have no more dealings with the Packs than is absolutely essential in the future. You can starve when a drought ruins your primitive agriculture, or die in an epidemic for lack of decent medicine. To use your own phrase, that's no skin off our noses."

Rob frowned but did not speak.

Higgins continued: "As for quelling the danger that Starn poses, my scientists and engineers can do the job if you'll give us what you've learned about those devices of his. Unfortunately, he left nothing at his home to give us a clew to his approach. So, if you will tell us what you've learned from Cytherni and Billy about the construction of his inventions, we'll get busy."

Rob shrugged. "They don't know. Cytherni wasn't interested enough to learn, and Starn sidetracked Billy when the boy became curious about the structural details of the gadgets. About all we know is that he used that menergy stuff in the things he made in the mountains. Billy has some vague ideas about other details, but I can't make enough sense out of them to describe them." He stared thoughtfully at Higgins' image. "If you want to make some headway on Starn," he said, "you'd better send a team of scientists down here. Maybe they'll know what kind of questions to ask Billy, to bring out what he does know.

"And besides, Higgins, the Packs will be able to see cooperating with you much easier if the work is done here, where we can be sure we know what's being accomplished, and that you're not preparing any unpleasant surprises for us. You'll have close access to Billy, and to other persons with well-developed Novo senses. It's not going to help you to build extensors for those senses unless you have the senses to apply them when they're complete."

Higgins fidgeted unhappily. "Sending scientists down there is out of the question," he said with a lack of conviction, "and it has been demonstrated that we normals often have touches of these senses."

"Touches is about all," said Rob.

"Damn!" cursed Higgins. "I wouldn't listen to such a nonsensical proposal for a minute if these new devices of Starn's didn't have such a disturbing potential!"

"Nor would I have suggested it," came Rob's tart reply. "We have no stomach for the close association with Olsaperns this emergency is forcing on us. But the point is that if we put our differences aside

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temporarily, and solve this problem quickly, the association can be kept brief. The way things are going, it could drag on for months—even years if Starn comes up with something new! Let's take the bitter pill quick, Higgins, and quit agonizing over it!"

Finally Higgins nodded grudgingly. "I'll take it up with our council and let you know," he agreed.

VI

At first Starn traveled by night and slept by day, staying in deep valleys as much as possible. His reason for this was to elude telepathic detection if Pack-Olsapern teams were continuing the search for him.

Most of the searching, he assumed, would be done during daylight hours, and a sleeping mind is harder to detect, and still harder to identify, than one that is awake. He tried to push himself severely enough during each night's trek to be dog-tired by dawn, so that he would sleep soundly until nightfall.

The pace began to tell on him in less than a week, and he eased off a bit. By then he was far from the spot where Billy had been taken, and could feel reasonably safe from anything except chance discovery or a massive search . . . or, of course, a search conducted with strongly extended Novo senses.

By now, he guessed, the Packs and the Olsaperns would be working hard—and together—on sense extensions, if they were ever going to work together at all. He had tried to leave nothing behind that would be too helpful to them; he had even risked returning to the scene of his escape from the Foser raiders, after he saw the fliers lifting away, to retrieve the Novo energy transmitter from the oak tree, but found that the bears had returned ahead of him and had left little to worry about.

He kept moving southward at a leisurely, cautious rate. Movement itself brought some risk of discovery, but summer was drawing to a close and he had no real idea how long he could remain untaken. Months, perhaps, in which case he wanted to seek winter quarters in a warm southern clime.

But the mountains were petering out, and at last he was forced to halt by the near certainty that Packs were living in the foothills ahead. In fact, he retreated northward a long march, to get out of range of winter hunting parties. There, in a cove that was both secluded and sheltered, he threw up a tight lean-to and settled down to wait.

It was with some wonder that he realized that matters which had been of vital concern to him only a few weeks ago now seemed distant, and of little pressing interest. This, he mused, was probably what happened when people went "back

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to nature." The draining demands of extracting food, shelter, and other bodily comforts from a primitive environment left little energy for other pursuits.

Thus, he thought a little about improving upon his menergy-powered devices, but no ideas came, so he did nothing more than think. His creative unconscious was not presented with an urgent need to produce new ideas, so it failed to produce.

Also, in his imagination he could see joint teams of Olsapern scientists and strong-sensed Pack men hard at work, exploring avenues that he—neither scientific nor strongly-sensed—could not even be aware of. What was the point of trying to compete with something like that?

More often his thoughts were of Cytherni. Of course she had learned from Billy, if she hadn't guessed before, that what had happened was not the result of an accidental fall from the flier. What would she be thinking of her loving husband now? Even a full explanation of the reasons for his actions, Starn fretted, might sound awfully empty to her. The point would still remain, as he had known it would from the beginning, that he had *used* her, not with her knowing compliance, but as an unwitting tool. How could any explanation make that right?

The weeks dragged by and summer faded. The mountain forest flamed with autumn reds and yellows. Starn eyed the empty sky with growing impatience. With every passing day the guessed-at activities of Pack men and Olsaperns seemed less important, and the need to see Cytherni and settle things with her one way or the other grew more insistent.

When the shadow of a hovering flier passed over him at last he almost yelled and waved, like a stranded castaway at the first sight of a rescuer. Before he recovered from this reaction he realized he had given his true feelings away to such an extent that it would be silly to make a pretense of trying to escape again, or to do battle with his captors. Indeed, it was also too late to activate a Novo transmitter to blind any telepaths aboard to his thoughts.

His game was over. He waited quietly.

A dropline snaked from the flier and one man came down. Starn walked forward. When he saw who it was, he said, "Hello, Rob."

Rob's feet touched the ground and he stood glaring angrily at Starn. Without trying to control his thoughts, Starn waited patiently while the telepath learned what he wanted to know.

"I'm usually called Foser now," Rob said rather stiffly. Then: "So you were never a threat, after all."

"How could I be?" shrugged Starn. "If I were both a gifted Novo

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and a knowledgeable scientist, maybe I could have hid out somewhere and developed the means of producing a revolution. But I was neither of those things. All I could do, with Billy's help, was make a start. That was enough, I hope, to get you and the Olsaperns into action, to produce the revolution I couldn't."

He grinned at the glowing Pack chief. "Looks like I succeeded. You've found me, at any rate. And what's that strange-looking helmet you're wearing?"

"A defense against your energy transmitter. A shield, but one I can read through."

"Sounds impressive," approved Starn. "Do you have much more stuff like that?"

"Too much more!" snapped Rob. "If you have anything to pack, pack it! If not, let's be on our way."

The dozen or so Pack men and Olsaperns on the flier watched Starn with various shades of silent disapproval as he climbed in and took a seat. Rob settled down near him as the flier headed north.

"Where are we going?" Starn asked.

"To the Compound," was Rob's short reply. In a moment he relented slightly and added, "The Olsaperns take you from there, according to our agreement. I don't know where. Don't care either."

"Are Cytherni and Billy at the Compound?"

Rob nodded. "They'll be staying there . . . or . . . well, the Olsaperns can have them, too, as far as I'm concerned! I'm fed up with the lot of you!"

The discovery of the manner in which he had been had by Starn was plainly annoying to Rob, despite the fact that the Olsaperns had been had just as thoroughly. Starn's antics had forced both peoples to spend months in unwilling —and to them unnatural—association and cooperation, and to learn now that he had been developing no monstrous weapons must come as a blow. They had been collaborating against a nonexisting danger.

"I'm sorry, Rob," Starn said softly. "It had to be done, and there was no other way I could do it."

"It *didn't* have to be done!" snarled Rob. "Things were going fine the way they were! Now you've got everyone confused and upset —and I might add you've caused your old father more heartbreak than any father deserves, much less a fine, gentle man like Virnce! You've undermined the faith of the Packs disasterously!"

The reference to his father stung Starn. He had known it would grieve Virnce, the Speaker at the Tenthday Services, to learn his own son had turned iconoclast. But it was a grief that had to be borne.

"If the faith of the Packs can be undermined by a few new

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facts," he said slowly, "it isn't much of a faith. Just as the science of the Olsaperns has already proved it isn't much of a science," he went on with a glance at the defensemen, "by rejecting new facts until they were shoved down its throat.

"The point is that, separately, the Packs and the Olsaperns were both wrong. Together they might be right—or at least closer to right. Both sides claim to love the truth. All right. Think of all the truth you've learned while working together! That helmet you're wearing. Whatever kind of gadget you used to locate me. Probably a lot of other things I don't know about. You understand your Novo senses better, and can use them more effectively. And Olsapern science has been broadened immeasurably. These are the fruits—"

"Bitter, unhealthy fruits!" hissed Rob.

"You don't know that," said Starn. "I'm not sure you even think it. You've merely been thrown off-balance because the world is changing after all these centuries, and you're not used to change. Nobody is."

"The world has always been changing," Rob argued. "We've been progressing steadily toward the Ultimate Novo."

"At a snail's pace, maybe we have. The Packs don't have to lose that goal of the ideal, fully-sensed man. But with the help of Olsapern science, which you've ignored up to now, don't you think you might reach your goal much quicker?"

"Ugh!" Rob grunted in disgust, and turned away.

Talk, Starn realized, would not make much impact on Rob's feelings—or, for that matter, on the course of events his actions had set in motion. What had been accomplished had been accomplished, and that was irretrievably that. His scheme had worked, and would open human horizons to undreamed-of breadth.

Also, it was a source of annoyance to a lot of people, including Rob, and of genuine personal grief to some, such as Starn's father, and to Cytherni—and thus in all likelihood to Starn himself.

The successful revolutionist sat in silence, lost in glum thoughts, for the remainder of the flight.

A large prefabricated building had risen in Smirth's meadow not far from the Compound, to house the joint research projects of Pack men and Olsapern scientists. It was surrounded by smaller sheds and numerous tents. The flier landed in a cleared area near the main building's entrance.

"Follow me," Rob ordered, and led Starn inside.

There a heated discussion was in progress among a sizable group of people from both sides of the Hard Line. Rob entered right into it, but Starn, not being telepathic, spent

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several minutes trying to figure out what was being debated. Meanwhile he was largely ignored by everyone present, including the image of Higgins which, after a passing angry glare at him, returned its attention to the argument.

These people, thought Starn, with a left-out feeling, *are all experts—some for what they know and some for what they are—and I'm a mere layman. A troublesome layman, at that.*

They used terms he couldn't guess the meaning of, but he kept trying to follow the argument until he finally caught on.

Word of his capture, and of his harmless recent activities, had of course been radioed ahead of the flier. So the people in the research center were discussing ways and means of concluding their joint project, now that the reason for it had been removed.

Starn laughed rather loudly, a derisive bark that brought all eyes on him.

"Nonsense!" snapped Rob, and several other telepaths grumbled.

"What's he thinking?" a scientist demanded.

"I'm thinking you'll never make it," Starn replied. "Now that you've started researching together, neither of you will dare break off the relationship. The Pack men have learned too much science to be trusted to work alone by the Olsaperns, and the Olsaperns could do too much with their own Novo senses to be trusted by the Packs!

"All you have to do to end your collaboration is learn to trust each other completely," he finished with a grin. "But if you could do that you wouldn't object to working together in the first place!"

Higgins' voice rumbled from a speaker: "I suppose you counted on this, too, didn't you?"

Starn shook his head slowly. "No. I never thought it through quite to this point. Other things could have happened. For one thing, you might have learned before now to like each other, because basically you're all pretty good folk.

"All I tried to do," he continued, "was to enable both sides to change their minds just enough to start working together, and to take the potentials of extended Novo senses seriously. You could have avoided all this, Higgins, if you hadn't refused to see plain facts when they were laid before you. Before any of you would look at the facts, the facts had to become a threat. That's what I made them. I don't believe either of you was afraid of what I, personally, would do with whatever I discovered, but you were afraid of what either of you would do to the other if just one of you got your hands on my gadgets.

"Something slightly like this happened back in the Science Age, you know. Everybody who was supposed to have good sense thought

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space travel was absurd, until a madman named Hitler started using giant rockets to carry weapons. Hitler was beaten too quickly for his enemies to team up and outdo him at building space rockets. After the war they started competing rocket programs, and explored separately because they were afraid to let any one nation take full control of space.

"If Hitler had lasted longer, and his enemies had gotten started in space on a cooperative basis, probably they wouldn't have dared to split up when the war ended. That's why I couldn't let you catch me too soon, and why I had to have something new and frightening to show you when you came after Billy. You had seen the threat by *then*, and that was enough of a mind-changer to start you working separately, just as the old nations did on space travel. I had to keep the threat going long enough after that to make you change your minds about working together as well. And now that you've—"

"Oh, shut up and get out of here!" roared Higgins. "We're going to work out a sensible plan to discontinue this project, young man, and we don't intend to be disrupted by your defeatist propagandizing! Get him out of there, won't you, Foser?"

"Scram, Starn!" snapped Rob. "We'll have no more troublemaking from you!"

Starn shrugged and wandered out of the building, feeling thoroughly deflated. He was no sooner outside than a small boy, belted with an assortment of unlikely gadgets and festooned with dangling wires, streaked up to him.

"Daddy!" the boy howled joyfully.

"Billy!" exclaimed Starn, hugging the boy close. "How's—"

"She'll be here in a minute. I run faster than she does. She don't want me to say anything about her."

"Oh." The boy was obviously rigged for telepathy and . . . probably Cytherni was right in not wanting the boy to try to act as a telepathic peacemaker. What was between her and Starn was best dealt with in their own modes of communication. "Why all the gadgets?" he asked to change the subject.

"So I can play with the Pack kids," said Billy. "Of course, I can do a lot of things they can't, with all this stuff of mine, and their folks won't let them use gadgets—most of 'em, anyway. And they can't sneak and do it, because their folks know everything they do! I'm sure glad *we* don't live here all the time!"

Before Starn could frame a reply to that, Cytherni came in sight. He put Billy down and walked toward her. The boy watched them for a moment, and then dashed away.

When they reached each other,

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Starn said, "I love you, Cythie. I hope you can still believe that."

"I've never doubted it, Starn," she replied softly. "And I love you."

"But I *used* you!" he said. "That's not something to forgive!"

"Not for you to forgive yourself for, but . . . you're forgiven by me." She looked curiously into his pained eyes and said, "If you can't use someone you love, and who loves you, when you have to, then who *can* you use?"

Starn puzzled over this line of reasoning, and shook his head. But things were going to be all right between them, and that was the important thing.

"I suppose I should visit my parents," he said after a moment, "if I will be welcome in my father's hut."

"You won't be welcome," she said, "but you must go, anyway. They will be more injured if you don't come. Then we can go home, the three of us. Everybody here will be glad to see us leave, Billy tells me."

"And I'll be glad to go," Starn said fervently.

But after two months of cozy, anticlimactic inactivity Starn grew dissatisfied with himself. There were compensations, certainly, such as Cytherni's announcement that she was pregnant, but Starn was a man whose goal had been attained, and he was left without a new aim, a motive for purposeful activity.

Cytherni had attacked her art with a strong burst of renewed inspiration, and Billy was busy with schooling, and the boy had also taken over the workshop Starn no longer cared to use. The boy apparently was brilliant, and his weeks of getting under foot at the joint research center had left him, Starn thought at times, knowing as much as all the scientists and Pack men together.

But Starn was at loose ends, and getting miserable.

Finally he risked a call to Higgins, and was pleased to find that the Defense Minister's anger with him had faded.

"Sure, I can find a job for you!" Higgins responded to his request. "There are plenty of administrative problems in our relations with the Packs—things you ought to know how to deal with. But don't expect any key positions, boy, not for a long time! You've made too

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many people too mad for that! But this is an expanding field, what with all the research and increased trade and what not. Come by tomorrow afternoon and we'll talk."

Starn thanked him and hung up in better spirits than he had been for days. If he, a revolutionary, could be of some value to the new world he had opened . . . well, so far as most historical precedents were concerned that would be a unique contribution in itself!

Billy came into his study, having detected, Starn guessed, his improved mood.

"Daddy, I know how to think things in a way that telepaths can't read, without using a shield or anything," the boy announced.

Starn considered this thoughtfully, and without much surprise. At last he said, "But aren't you giving the trick away in telling me about it? If others find out from me that you can have secret thoughts they'll know at least not to trust the thoughts they *think* are all you are having."

"I know that, Daddy," the boy said gravely. "So I want to show you how to think secret, too, so you can hide this."

"It would be a good ability to have in this job I was talking to Higgins about," Starn mused. "O.K."

He followed the boy into the workshop, and half an hour later he had learned the trick—plus a lot about the working of the human mind that he had never suspected.

"How did you get onto this?" he asked.

"By turning the gadgets on myself, instead of the environment," the boy replied. "Mommy thinks I have a Narcissus complex, and I guess I have a little. Anyway, I wanted to look at me, and when I did, one of the things I learned was how to think secret."

Starn chuckled and regarded the boy proudly. "Anything else important in you?" he asked.

Billy nodded. "I guess I can tell you, now that you can hide it: That theory about a communication line between the unconscious and the genes is right, only the line don't work very well, or very often. I found how to make it work good, in me or in anybody."

"You mean," asked Starn through a suddenly dry throat, "that you can order genetic changes of any kind you wish?"

"Uh-huh," the boy nodded.

"Billy," Starn began tightly, "you haven't meddled—"

"Oh, no. You and Mommy wouldn't like that! My baby sister will be pretty much like me, I guess. But my own children—"

Starn's knees felt weak, so he sank into a chair, staring at his seven-year-old son.

At least the boy wasn't going off half-cocked, testing his new-found ability of genetic manipulation. Maybe by the time he was old

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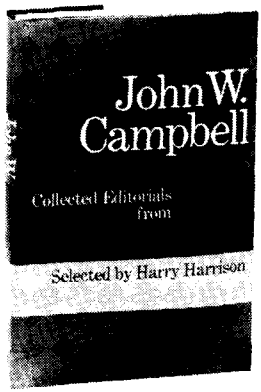

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enough to have children of his own he also would have the wisdom.

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Billy was looking at him with a slight smile. "Gosh, Daddy, you're an awful alarmist!" he said soothingly and with a touch of amusement. "It won't be that hard to do."

Starn, a revolutionary who had ripped the status quo asunder and filled countless complacent lives with the uncertain gales of change, continued to stare at his son, shocked to the core of his being by the realization that his own grandchildren would be *Ultimate Novo!*

Or . . . *something!* ■

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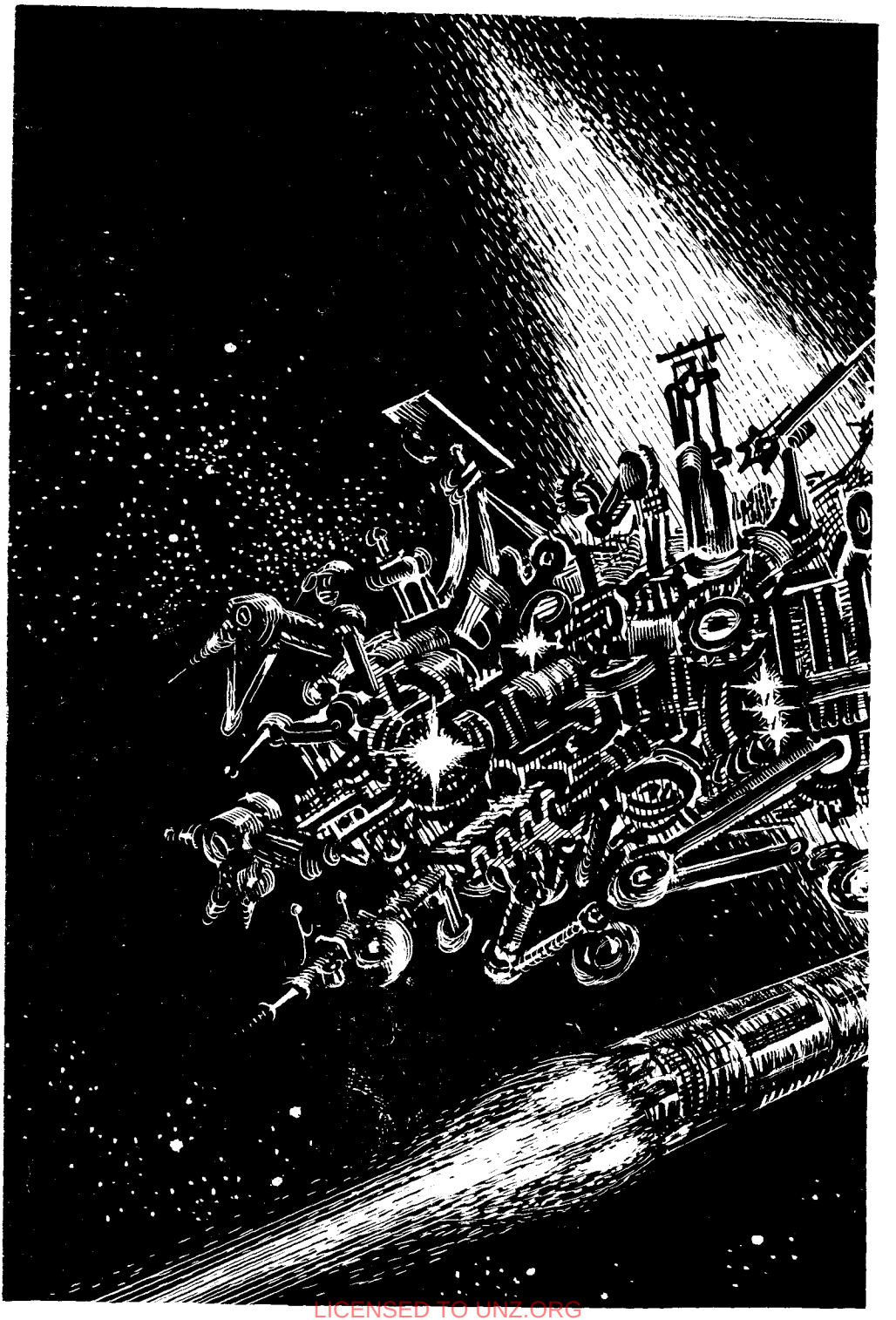

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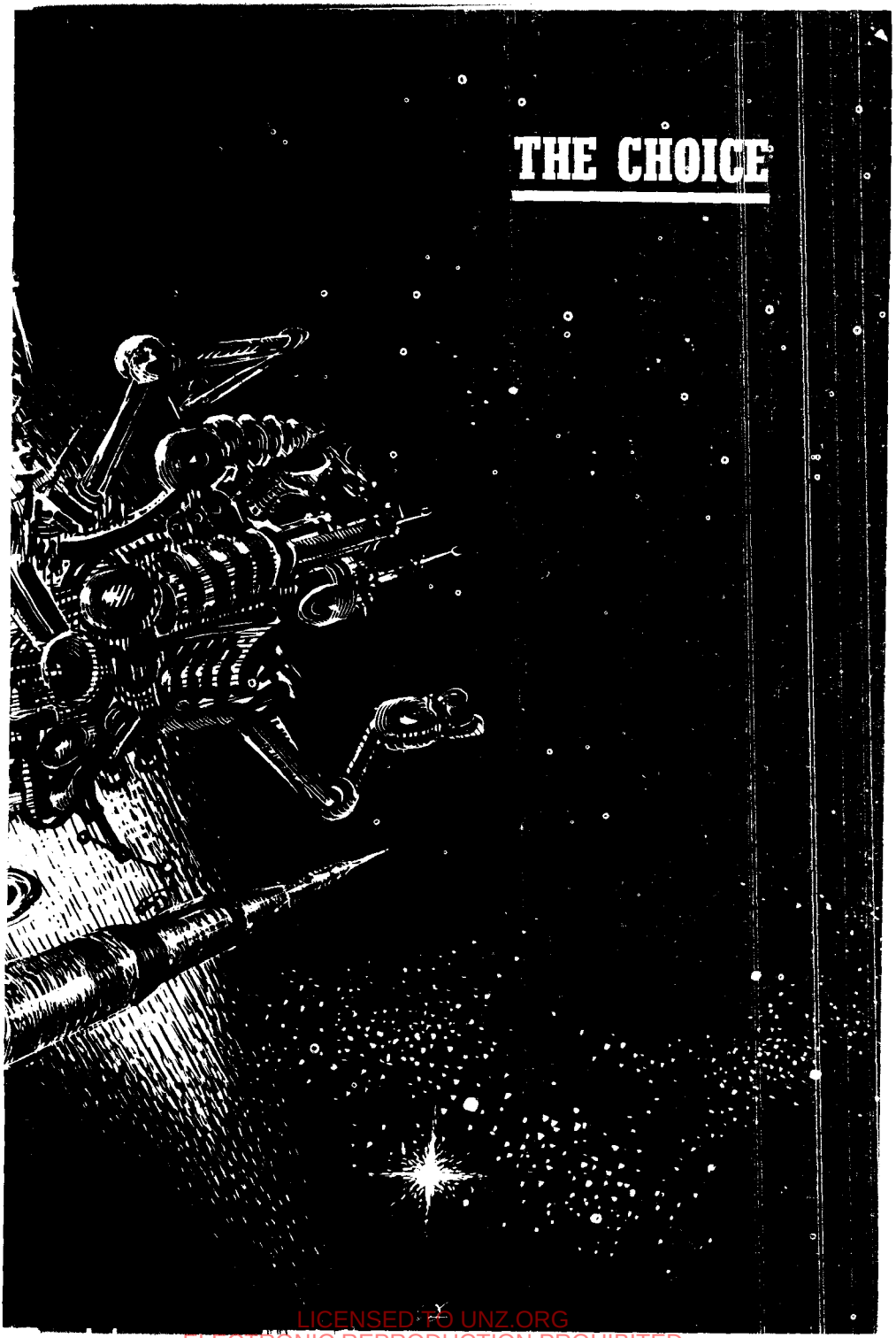
THE CHOICE



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The essential lesson in the old "Three Wishes" fairy tales is:

"Be careful of what you wish for—you might get it!"

KEITH LAUMER

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

For a second or two, when the red ALERT light started flashing, I didn't know what it meant; then I saw the crinkly lines wiggling across the counterscope and I knew that something out there was giving off patterned radiation. Considering the fact that we were nine hundred million miles out from Earth in unexplored space, that was kind of a surprise. My first impulse was to switch on the transmitter and give whatever it was a hail—but Commander Ironblood was awake when he shouldn't have been. In two of those snappy military steps he was beside me, elbowing me out of the comm seat and pushing buttons with both hands. He was a big, thick man with quarter-inch gray stubble across his skull, and barbed wire for nerves.

"Mr. Barker," he said past me as if I wasn't there, "duty station, if you please. Power off. Observe total radiation silence." I wish I could say he yelled, but he sounded just as iceberg-cool as he had back at Sands, the day he told me the personnel computer had picked me out of the reserve files as third man on the Neptune Probe.

"I didn't ask to have an untrained, unqualified civilian aboard my command," he had told me, "but since you're assigned, you'll conduct yourself as a SpArm officer. The first thing you'll do is get a haircut—and get rid of that vacuous smile. Space is a serious business."

I stopped smiling, all right, as soon as I got my first look at the ship, all gray paint and DO and DON'T signs.

"You mean I'm going to spend a year and a half cooped up in this oversized phone booth?" I yelped.

Barker, the Number Two, had grinned at me out of the corner of his mouth. He had one of those scraped-bone faces, plastered over with freckles.

"What did you expect, Goodlark?" he asked, "the Imperial suite, complete with gold doorknobs, silk sheets, and breakfast in bed?"

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"Sure," I said. "Why not? Exploring the planets ought to be a groove. Why come on like a bunch of monks? Why not have a little fun while we're at it?"

He was grinning the same grin now; I guess he read my expression.

"Still looking for kicks, Goodlark?"

"Why the creep routine?" I countered. "Why don't we get excited and yell and wave or something?"

"That's not the SpArm tradition, boy. No sissy stuff for us. We mean business."

"I always thought seeing Barsoom up close would be a gas," I said. "But all we gave it was a dirty look. How did we ever get started with this by-the-numbers jazz? Where's all the music and laughter gone?"

"Are you kidding?" Barker looked shocked. "At two point seven billion bucks a shot, you better not be caught laughing."

Just then the main fore DV screen picked up something. Ironblood switched it up to high mag. The image jumped at us.

"Holy leaping Mehitable," Barker said. "Would you look at that!"

It was something to look at: like the insides of a satellite radar station, but without the station. Big—no telling how big against all that blackness—and complicated, glittering all over with lights and shiny planes and tubes, and things that moved in long, slow strokes like mechanical arms. It hung there, looking at us. It was alert, aware—but not alive. Somehow you could tell that, just looking at it. It got bigger fast.

"That's nothing *our* boys ever built," Barker said. "Ye gods, Cap'n—that thing's *alien!*"

"We're closing rapidly," Ironblood said with no visible emotion. "Recommendations, Mr. Barker?"

"Let's arm our missiles and get a look at the whites of their eyes," Barker said in clipped tones.

"Captain Ironblood," I said, "I have a better suggestion: let's turn on our nav lights and blink out a greeting. Maybe an eight-bar—rhythm. They might dig that better than the pussyfoot routine—"

He gave me a look like a jab with a sharp stick.

"SpArm isn't paying our salaries to play astrohippy on NASA time," he barked. That was as far as he got before there was a sharp *bleep!* and the walls dissolved around us like a switched-off solido.

We were still strapped into our acceleration couches, but now they were sitting in the middle of a little white-walled room about the size of a dentist's surgery, and with that same feeling of something painful about to happen.

"Great galloping giraffes!" Barker said. "The ship's gone! Dissolved around our ears like . . . like—"

"Like a solido projection switching off," the captain said. "Stand

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fast." He unstrapped and prowled the room, feeling of the walls.

"They're real enough," he said. "It appears, gentlemen, that we've been made captive." He faced the two of us. "It's pretty plain that we're in the hands of a nonhuman intelligence of a high technical competence. I don't need to remind you that from this point on, our actions will determine their impressions of the human race. Whatever happens, we must show no signs of weakness or uncertainty. We'll present a united facade of defiance and dare them to do their worst."

"B-but what if they're friendly?" I asked.

Ironblood jerked a thumb at the walls that enclosed us. "Does this look friendly?"

"Where are they hiding?" Barker blurted. "Why don't they come out and fight like men?"

There was a loud *click!* from somewhere, and he whirled, fists cocked.

"Welcome aboard, gentlemen," a smooth voice said. "Please remain calm. You have been randomly selected for stat analysis, and are herewith designated specimens A, B, and C. If you're ready, testing can commence at once."

There were a few seconds of a silence as heavy as wet underwear. Then Ironblood spoke up:

"Who are you?" he called. "*Where* are you?"

"I'm all about you," the voice said. "Or, more simply stated, you are inside me."

"You mean we've been eaten?" Barker yapped.

"Not precisely, since I don't eat. I am a mere artifact, an information gathering device dispatched by the Galactic authorities on a routine sweep of the sector."

"Galactic authorities, eh?" Ironblood muttered. "Well, now we know who the enemy is. I suppose their espionage apparatus has been spying on us for years, monitoring our radio broadcasts, waiting for this opportunity. But they'll find SpArm personnel tough nuts to crack. Name, rank, and serial number, that's all we tell them."

"Listen, Captain," I said quickly, "why don't we mention that we bruise easily, and that, although we come from a small, backward planet, we're pretty important to ourselves? Once they realize we're harmless and scared—"

"As you were, Mr. Goodlark!" Ironblood cut me off. "We'll wait for their next move without whining. I suspect they can observe our actions, overhear our talk—perhaps even read our thoughts. We'll, therefore, think positively. Keep your minds on SpArm regulations. Think of the Alamo and Pearl Harbor. Let them know we're prepared to die like men!"

"Why rush things? If we think peaceful thoughts, maybe they'll get the idea—"

"The idea we're weaklings?"

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Ironblood barked at Goodlark.

"That's it!" I said. "I mean, why put on an act? Just let it all hang out. We'll tell them we like to dance and sing; too bad SpArm regs didn't allow me to bring my eighty-eight stringer, I could play a few cool notes for them—"

"Dance? Sing? You're out of your mind with terror, man! Consider yourself under arrest!"

"What's the point of this kamikaze approach?" I yelled. "I have plans that involve living to a ripe old age—and there's a girl named Daisy Fields who'll be pretty broken up if I don't come back—"

"Mere individuals are expendable, Goodlark, you know that—"

"Time is of the essence, gentlemen," the voice cut in. "We'll have to hurry along now. I'll fire a standard stimulus-array at you and record your response-gestalts . . ."

"Ignore Goodlark's responses," Ironblood ordered the voice. "The man is a degenerate, a freak, not representative of his species. You may base your conclusions on my reactions, and those of Mr. Barker. Remember, Barker," he added in a low tone, "Regulations! Discipline! CinC SpArm is counting on you!"

Suddenly the floor turned to wax. As we floundered, lights flashed, red and green and blue. I was clawing my way through a fog as thick as taffy, while sounds blared, squeaked, buzzed. There was a reek of burnt feathers, synthetic rubber, a whiff of molasses, attar of roses, old socks, new leather, dead fish. I was hot, then cold. Pictures of tigers and girls and fast cars and tidal waves and pizzas and sunsets flashed through my brain. Voices yelled, whispered, things poked, rubbed, pinched, stroked me. I mustered what control I had left for a yell, and abruptly it was all gone and the white walls were back. Barker hung in his chair, looking a little pale under the freckles. Captain Ironblood's hair was slightly rumpled and his collar was turned up on one side, but he was still holding a face like a sphinx.

"Let them have their fun," he rasped. "We'll show them they can't break us."

"Why not yell or something, Captain?" I managed to croak. "Maybe they think we like it."

"I'm warning you, Goodlark," Ironblood snarled, "you do or say anything to disgrace the uniform, and I'll personally throttle you! Clear?"

"Strange, very strange," the disembodied voice of the machine said. "They're going to have a hard time believing some of this back at Galactic Center. Still, I suppose it takes all kinds of life forms to make a Universe. Now, gentlemen, Galactic policy requires that all testees be fully compensated for any inconvenience I may have caused. Accordingly, I'm prepared to render my assistance to you in

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the achievement of your personal goals. My facilities are limited, of course, but I can offer you a degree of choice in the matter—"

"You mean—you've already completed your evaluation?" Ironblood took a deep breath and straightened his collar.

"Chins up, men," he murmured. "We'll soon be on our way." He cleared his throat.

"Ah, before we go," he called, "I wonder if you'd mind telling us how we measured up—just as a matter of curiosity?"

"Why, you reacted as you must, what else? But now, on to the final question: Specimen A, how would you prefer to die: by hanging, drowning, or fire?"

"It's no more than I expected from the beginning," Ironblood said, looking a little pale around the jaws but still holding his cool.

"Cap'n, tell 'em they can't do this—" Barker started.

"I'll not beg for quarter."

"I guess it figures," Barker said. "It can't complete its report until it sees one of us die. Well, I guess you'll show 'em, Cap'n—"

"Stop chattering, you fool," Ironblood said. "I have a decision to make. I'll discount hanging at once. It has a felonious connotation I don't care for."

"I don't know, Cap'n," Barker said judiciously. "They say it's pretty humane. I mean the neck snaps, *zop,* like that, and it's all over—unless the drop is too short and you choke to death," he added doubtfully.

"I've never cared much for the idea of drowning," Ironblood said. "On the other hand, death by fire is reported to be rather uncomfortable too, for that matter."

"Boy, I've really got to admire the way you're taking it, Cap'n," Barker said.

"I seem to recall that if you inhale the flames, you scorch the bronchi, bringing instant death," Ironblood said hopefully.

"Hey, neat," Barker said. "I'll remember that."

"Good luck, Mr. Barker." Ironblood thrust out his hand and they gave each other the Grip, their Academy rings glinting in the glow from the walls. Ironblood looked at me.

"You're a civilian, Goodlark," he said, "but I expect you to follow Lieutenant Commander Barker's orders as if they were my own." He looked up at the ceiling.

"All right, fire it is," he said. "I'm ready."

There was a sharp hissing sound, and suddenly there was a heap of faggots half as big as a haystack, and Ironblood strapped to a stake in the middle. Smoke whiffed up, and then red flames flickered and grew and in five seconds the whole thing was blazing away. I got a last glimpse of Ironblood standing at attention in the middle of the bon-

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fire, and then the smoke and flames covered him.

"He went out like a man," Barker said. "He gave himself to save us, and never whimpered."

A brisk draft had carried the last of the smoke away. There wasn't even a singed spot on the floor to show where the captain had made his exit.

"All right, you've had your fun," Barker said to the room. "Now how about putting us back aboard our vessel so we can get on with the mission?"

"Unfortunately," the voice stated, "your ship has been disassociated into its component atoms, in much the same manner as has Specimen A."

"You destroyed our ship?" Barker yelled.

"It could be reconstituted, of course, if needed," the voice said. "But to what end? I have a question for you to answer, remember?"

"Huh? You mean—the captain's sacrifice was for nothing? You're going to offer me the same lousy choice he had?"

"You disapprove of the alternatives offered?"

"I sure as hell do!"

"In that case, B, you may select your preference from among the following: shooting, stabbing, or garroting."

Barker gave me his favorite crooked grin. "Well, Goodlark, it looks like the end of the trail for me. But don't feel bad. I guess your turn comes next."

"Listen, Barker," I said, feeling kind of cold-sweaty and hot at the same time. "Why take it like a bunch of zombies? Why don't we do what comes naturally and kick and scream and beg for mercy or something?"

Barker showed me a large, knuckly fist. "You let the cap'n down and I'll beat your skull in.

"What I mean is, I don't like those choices at all, frankly. Do we have to just sit here?"

Barker's grin got crookeder. "Forget it, kid. We've had it. But you're right about one thing. I'm not sitting here and taking it like a little lamb, the way the cap'n did. I'm giving them a fight."

"How?" I said. "Who do you fight?"

"I dislike rushing you, but I'm a hundred and three years behind schedule already," the voice said. "Your choice, please, Specimen B."

"Shooting, stabbing, or garroting," Barker mused. "A bullet is an easy out, assuming the hit man knows his job. Stabbing: slower, unless the knife gets to just the right spot—and messy. Garroting, now—that's the lousiest way to go yet. But at least there's something to get hold of. Yeah. I'll go the rope route."

Barker clenched his fists, half crouched, and tried to watch in

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every direction at once. He almost made it—except that the noose dropped from straight above, whipped around his neck like a snake, and snapped tight before he could make a move. His tongue poked out, and his eyeballs, and something made a noise like stepping on a paper cup, and it was all over.

And now it was my turn.

"Specimen C, judging by B's reaction, you, too, will desire a unique demise," the voice said cheerfully. "Accordingly, I can offer you the following selection: death by poisoning—fast-acting, of course; anoxia; or simple heart failure. I'd have liked to widen the scope to include exhaustion, desiccation, and starvation, but they're too time-consuming, I'm afraid."

I heard myself swallow. I tried to speak, but my tongue didn't want to cooperate. I thought about the bitter taste of arsenic; I thought about not being able to breathe; I thought about sharp pains in the chest . . .

"Well, how about it, C?" the voice said. "Name your choice."

"N-n-n," I said. "None of them."

"Eh?" the machine said. "How's that?"

"None of them, blast you!" I yelled. "I don't like any of your shortcuts to oblivion! I prefer to get there in my own way, in my own sweet time!"

"Really?" the voice sounded shocked. "But—my study of the motivations of specimens A and B indicated that their whole lives were a pell-mell rush to destruction —theirs, and everyone else's—"

"Maybe so—but don't include me in your statistics! I'm not quite as high-minded as they were."

"Then—what *do* you want?" the machine asked.

I told it.

"Routine, Mr. Barker," Captain Ironblood said. "It was a simple matter of calling their bluff. Once they saw we weren't to be intimidated by their threats, they backtracked in a hurry."

"I've got to admit it looks that way," Barker said. "But I'll tell you frankly, Cap'n: when I felt that hemp cut into my neck, I never expected to wake up back here aboard ship, on course and in perfect health."

"The illusions were fairly graphic," Ironblood said. "But I was quite certain, privately, that they would never go so far as to murder SpArm personnel."

"Well, I guess all's well that ends well," Barker said. "But I'd like to see the look on Headquarters' face when they get our report."

I had an urge to speak up and tell them how surprised the Census machine had been when it found out SpArm regs didn't quite cover the whole range of human aspirations, and how accommodating it had been, once it realized its mistake.

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"There's one other thing," I had told it after it had reconstituted the ship and fixed it up a little. "Kind of a minor point, I guess, but don't you think you ought to reconstitute specimens A and B, too?"

"But surely, in view of their avowed aspirational patterns, they are better off where they are."

"Probably; but CinC SpArm might not understand. And I wonder if you couldn't make a few adjustments to help them adjust to the new conditions."

So the machine had popped them back into existence, as good as new, or maybe a little better. But it wouldn't do any good to tell *them* that. They wouldn't have believed a word of it.

"There's just one thing that's a little unclear, Cap'n," Barker was saying. "Why is it that you and I have to spend the rest of the cruise cooped up in this crummy little compartment, while Mr. Goodlark has the Imperial suite to himself, complete with a staff of ten, breakfast in bed, et cetera?"

Ironblood frowned. "I can't recall at the moment just why that is," he said. "No doubt the strain of what we've been through has given us a little area of confusion there. Suffice it to say it's all in accordance with SpArm regs . . . I think."

"It must be," Barker said. "Otherwise, why would there be an Imperial suite aboard a three-man scout in the first place?"

"Logical thinking, Barker," Ironblood said.

I didn't wait around to hear the rest. I eased the gold-plated door shut and turned and walked across the ankle-deep carpet past the table where the evening banquet was spread out to where Daisy Fields Waited for me. ■

IN TIMES TO COME

Next issue we lead off with a powerful novelette—"The Teacher," by Colin Kapp.

It's long been said that "experience is the best teacher, if man will learn." Or any other intelligent entity. The trouble with that is that it is difficult to learn anything from a suddenly fatal experience; mammalian life forms invented warm blood and suckling the young—and another extremely important proposition: painful physical punishment. Punishment can be defined as "a teaching substitute for being eaten alive." If the experience is too violent, and too sudden, it destroys instead of helping.

However, the trouble with teaching is that the Big Help may cause a permanent injury to the student. The natural tendency to follow the least-effort path means that the student tends to avoid learning, which is effortful, and ask for more help. *(continued on page 151)*

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the man from R.O.B.O.T.

Robots cannot be trusted to make broad policy and strategic decisions, though they're fine at tactics—but in a campaign to correct a paranoid planetary population, it takes only a few policy decisions. And only one man . . .

by Harry Harrison

Illustrated by Peter Skirka

The framework of the battered spaceship was still trembling from the impact of landing, when the cargo hatch squealed open. With deft mechanical speed a claw-equipped handling boom dropped a drawer-filled store counter down onto the parched soil, then whipped out a gaudy, well-patched canopy which it spread above it. Still working swiftly, it brought out chairs, boxes, robots, a water cooler, a cash register, a cuspidor and countless other devices.

Almost as a side thought, in the midst of all this scurried activity, a rattling metal ladder dropped from the hatch to the ground. Down this, dodging the rushing boom, climbed a man. He was dressed in a gaudy checked coverall and wore, at a rakish angle, a round brimmed, ancient style headpiece known as a "derby." Before he reached the ground he was sweating profusely. His name was Henry Venn, though his friends called him Hank.

Bone-dry dust spurted out as Henry trudged over to the long counter and dropped into the chair behind it. He flicked a switch and loud, brassy music blared out. As he drew a paper cupful of water from the cooler the music faded to be replaced by a booming recording of his voice.

"Come get 'em, come buy 'em, come grab 'em—while they're hot, cold or just lukewarm. You will never again in your lifetime see machines, household appliances or robots like these so BUY BUY BUY before they're all gone!"

All this high-pressured salesmanship and scurried activity appeared highly out of place in the barren landscape. The orange sun burned down, raising undulating heat-waves. The spaceship had landed at the very end of the spaceport, which was really just a cleared, fenced field. At the far end, barely visible through the shimmering air, were the tower and port facilities, the soil baked and nothing moved. Henry lifted his hat and wiped first his forehead with a handkerchief, then the hat's sweatband, before

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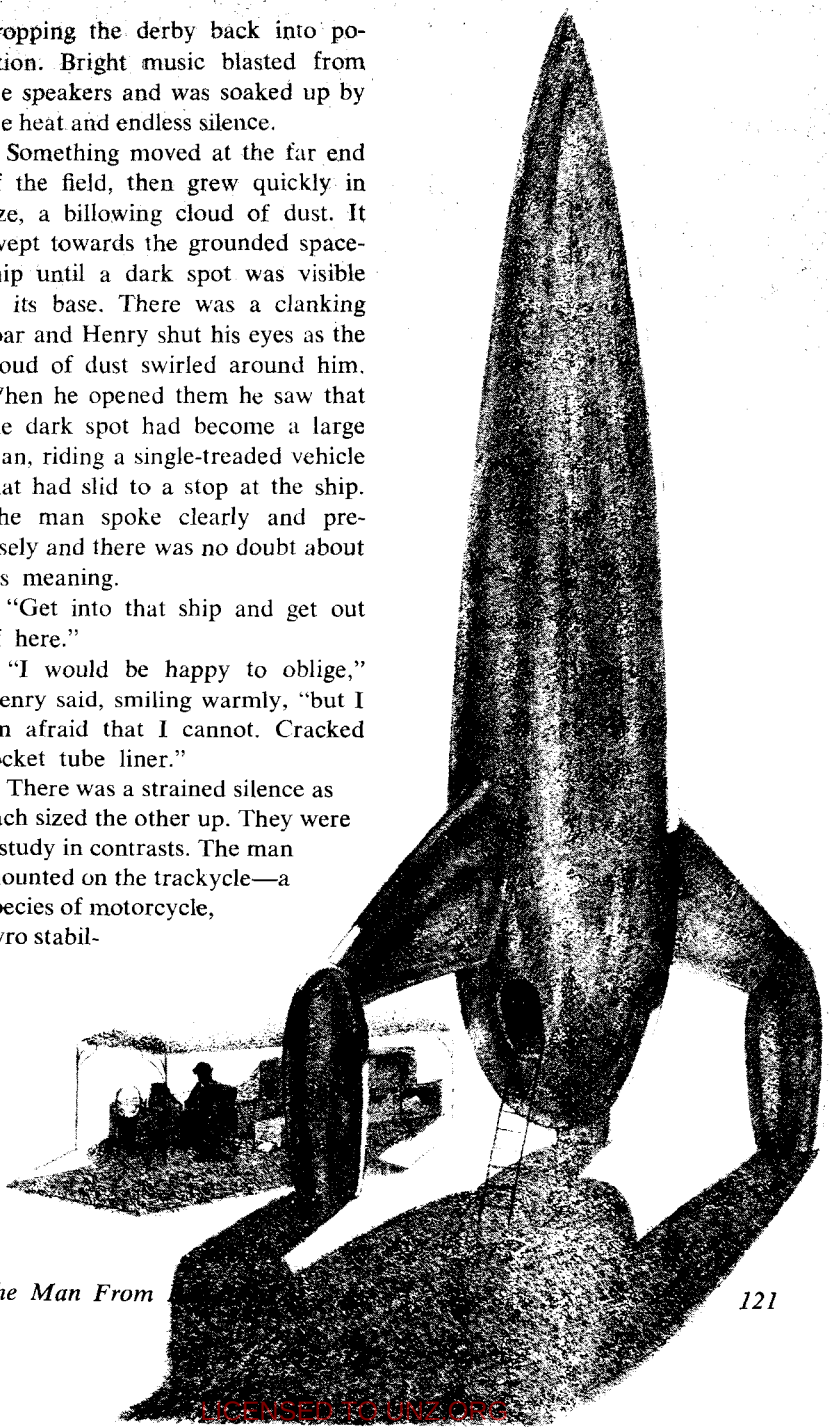
dropping the derby back into position. Bright music blasted from the speakers and was soaked up by the heat and endless silence.

Something moved at the far end of the field, then grew quickly in size, a billowing cloud of dust. It swept towards the grounded spaceship until a dark spot was visible at its base. There was a clanking roar and Henry shut his eyes as the cloud of dust swirled around him. When he opened them he saw that the dark spot had become a large man, riding a single-treaded vehicle that had slid to a stop at the ship. The man spoke clearly and precisely and there was no doubt about his meaning.

"Get into that ship and get out of here."

"I would be happy to oblige," Henry said, smiling warmly, "but I am afraid that I cannot. Cracked rocket tube liner."

There was a strained silence as each sized the other up. They were a study in contrasts. The man mounted on the trackycle—a species of motorcycle, gyro stabil-



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ized, with a powered track instead of wheels—was tall, spare, weather-beaten. He peered from under the shelter of his wide-brimmed hat and his right hand rested carefully on the butt of a worn pistol in a holster on his leg. He looked very efficient.

Henry Venn looked very inefficient. He was moon-faced and smiling, and unkind people had even called him pudgy. He slumped where the other man sat erect and the sweat-dampened, white-skinned hand that he reached out for the cup of water trembled ever so slightly.

"Have a drink?" he asked. "Good cold water. My name is Venn, Henry Venn, and my friends call me Hank. I'm afraid I didn't catch yours. Sheriff," he added, noticing the word on the gold badge pinned to the other's broad chest.

"Get your junk into the ship. Blast off from here. You've got two minutes before I shoot you."

"I would love to oblige, believe me. But the cracked liner—"

"Put in a new one. Blast off from here."

"I would—if I had a spare. Which I don't. You don't happen to know if there is one here in the spaceport?"

"Blast off from here," the sheriff said again, but his heart wasn't really in it this time. You could see that he was thinking about the tube liner and what had to be done to get the stranger and his ship off-planet. Henry took advantage of the momentary lull to press a switch, on the back of the counter, with his knee.

"Real Olde Rottgutt Whiskey, the best in the galaxy," a small robot shouted tinnily, springing to life on the top of the counter. It appeared to be constructed from sections of pipe and had large pliers for jaws. It held an amber bottle in its tonglike hands, which it thrust forward towards the sheriff.

The tall man reacted instantly, pulling out a long-barreled gun and pulling the trigger. There was a cloud of smoke and a loud bang and the bottle flew into fragments.

"Try to kill me, hey," the sheriff shouted, swinging the pistol towards the other man and pulling the trigger.

Henry did not move, nor did the smile leave his face. The gun clicked, then clicked again rapidly as the sheriff pulled at the trigger. With a horrified look at the still placid Henry, he jammed the gun back into its holster, gunned his engine to life, then tore away in the center of a growing cloud of dust.

"Now what was all that about?" Henry asked, apparently speaking to the thin air around him. The air answered back: a hoarse voice that whispered in his ear.

"The individual with the combustion-pellet weapon intended to do you injury. This weapon is con-

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structed of ferrous metals. I, therefore, generated an intense and localized magnetic field that kept the internal parts from moving and, therefore, the weapon from operating."

"He'll think something is phony about that."

"Hardly. The records indicate that these weapons are prone to malfunctions. This malfunction is called a 'misfire'."

"I'll remember that," Henry said, taking a sip of water.

"You'll remember what?" a shrill voice asked from the other side of the counter.

Henry had to lean far forward to see the small boy who stood there, his head below the level of the counter top.

"I'll remember that you are my first customer on this fair planet, therefore you must receive the special First Customer prize."

He played a quick pattern on the keyboard inset before him, and a flap opened in the counter top. The pipe-limbed robot reached into the revealed opening and pulled out a foot-wide, candy-striped lollypop. He extended it towards the little boy who eyed it suspiciously.

"What's that thing?"

"A particularly toothsome form of candy. You take the wooden part in one hand and stick the round part in your mouth."

The boy did this instantly and began crunching on the lollypop.

"Do you know who the man was who just left?" Henry asked.

"The sheriff." The words were mumbled around the dissolving sweet.

"Is that the only name he has?"

"Sheriff Mordret. The kids don't like him."

"I hardly blame them—"

"What's he eating?" a voice asked, and Henry turned to see a larger boy, a teen-ager, who had appeared as silently as the first.

"Candy. Would you like some? The first piece is free."

After a moment's consideration the boy nodded *yes*. Henry bent to a lower drawer in the counter so his face would be concealed while he whispered. The boys could not hear him, but the tracking microphones of the ship picked his words up clearly.

"What's going on here? Where are these kids coming from? Are you asleep on the job?"

"Computers do not sleep," the projected voice of the ship said in his ear. "The boys are not armed and move very cautiously. It is my opinion they do not pose a threat. There are five more of them approaching the ship from different directions."

They came sidling up to the counter, one by one, and each accepted a free piece of candy. Henry pressed a key on the cash register and a bell rang, the drawer flew open and the little sign reading

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NO SALE appeared in the window.

"That's what it is so far, boys," he told them. "No sale. Not one. So what will it be—more candy? I have plenty here. Toys, books, you name it, I stock them all. Rush home and crack into your piggy banks and buy a memrobot, a two-way radio, a—"

"A gun?" the teen-ager asked hopefully. "I think I could use a gun."

"Robbie's getting big enough he's going to need a gun soon," a smaller boy said and the others nodded in agreement.

"Sorry, I don't stock guns," Henry said, which was an outright lie. "And even if I did I couldn't sell them to minors."

"I'll get a gun from my uncle when I want to," Robbie said, scowling fiercely.

The cash register jingled merrily for a few minutes as the boys produced what small change they had in exchange for the assorted items that small boys always buy.

"Nice planet you got here," Henry said, pushing a stack of soundie comic books across the counter for Robbie's inspection. There was the sound of tiny explosions, bits of dialog, and the roar of miniature rocket engines heard as he flipped through the pages.

"Not bad if you like cows," he mumbled, more interested in the new comics.

"Get many visitors here?"

"None. People here on Slagter don't like strangers."

"Well you must get some. One at least. I know the Galactic Census came through this system a while back. I think a Commander Sergejev was in charge."

"Oh, yeah, him." Tiny, savage screams sounded from the open pages. "But he just landed and went right away again—"

Robbie broke off and cocked his head to one side. He closed the magazine and slid a coin across to pay for it, then turned away. The other boys were starting away with their purchases, too. In a few moments they were gone.

"And what is all that about?" Henry asked aloud.

"A vehicle is approaching from the direction of the spaceport," the computer said. "The boys' hearing is superior to yours and they detected it earlier."

"They're younger so they can hear higher frequencies," Henry grumbled. "And I can hear it now, too. And even see the dust with my fine, superior twenty-twenty vision. Wise guy computer."

"I simply state the facts," it answered, with mechanical smugness.

The new arrival was a halftrack truck that roared up and slid to a screeching stop. Henry sighed as the resultant dust cloud rolled over him. Did everyone on Slagter drive in this headlong way?

A man jumped down from the

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cab, and he could have been a brother or a near relative of the sheriff. Here again was the wide hat and steely gaze, leather-tanned skin and ready gun.

"Does a 30-M3 tube liner fit the jets on that bucket of bolts you fly?" the man asked.

"It sure does," Henry said brightly. "Do you know where I can get one?"

"Here," the newcomer said, pulling the tall ceramic tube from the back of the truck and dropping it onto the counter. "That will be exactly four hundred sixty-seven credits."

Henry nodded and rang open the register. "I can give you three point two five in cash, and my check for the balance."

"Cash on the line."

"Then I'm afraid that you will have to wait until I sell some of my high-class wares, because I'm a little short on cash at this moment."

The man's eyes narrowed and his fingers tapped at the butt of his gun.

"I tell you what I'll do. I'll barter. Trade you this tube liner for a mess of guns, rifles, grenades, ammu—"

"I'm sorry, but I do not stock lethal weapons. However I have some first-class robots for all uses."

"Fighting and killing robots?"

"No, not that kind. But I can sell you a bodyguard robot that will prevent anything or anybody from hurting you. What about that?"

"If it works, it's a deal. Trot it out."

Henry tapped a fast pattern on his control keys. The robot would be an ordinary general purpose type, but its responses would be specially programmed for this job. He instructed the computer as to just what he wanted. Less than ten seconds later a gleaming, manlike robot appeared in the open hatch above and rushed headlong down the ladder. It sprang to the ground at the bottom and rendered a snappy salute.

"What kind of robot are you?" Henry asked.

"I am a bodyguard robot. I will do everything in my power to keep he, she, or it that I am guarding from harm."

"It is a he, and there he is. Guard him."

The robot ran in a quick circle about his new master and, seeing no immediate dangers, stood, humming alertly, at his side. The man looked the machine suspiciously up and down.

"Doesn't look like much. How do I know it will work?"

"I shall demonstrate."

Henry took a long-bladed hunting knife from one of the drawers and gasped it firmly by the hilt. Then, with an unexpected leap he hurled himself across the counter shouting "Kill! Kill!"

The action was over before the startled man could draw his gun.

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The robot sprang into position, grabbed and twisted. The knife spun away into the dust and Henry was flat on his back on the ground, with one of the robot's feet planted firmly on his chest.

"It's a deal," the man said, letting his gun slide back into the holster. "Now get that liner in and haul out of here before sundown, or you won't live to see the dawn."

"A most unfriendly planet," Henry said, brushing the dust from his clothes as he watched the half-track speed off with his robot. "Do you believe the boy's story—that Sergejev left this planet?"

"Highly doubtful," the computer said. "The odds are exactly 97.346 to 1 against it. A commander in the Galactic Census does not leave without his ship."

"And his ship is buried right here under this field. How far are we from it?"

"The concealed ship is fifteen feet below the surface and exactly one hundred thirty-five feet six inches northeast of your right toe. I fixed its location precisely before we landed through an exchange of information with its computer. I felt that suspicion would be attached if the landing was effected directly over the buriel site."

"A wise decision, I'm sure. How is the tunnel coming?"

"It is completed. I sent the boring machine down through the landing leg and it reached the entrance port of the other ship exactly three point eight six minutes ago. It has now returned and is digging a secondary tunnel to your counter."

"Let me know when it arrives. And this time I sincerely hope that you will do something spectacular in the way of reinforcing the tunnel walls."

There was a momentary silence before the ship spoke again—signifying a rapid search of countless memory files, followed by some equally speedy deductions.

"It is my conclusion that you are referring, in a negative and/or satirical manner, to the affair on Gilgamesh IV where there was a minor tunnel cave-in. I have explained before that this was wholly accidental, due to—"

"I've heard your explanation. I just want you to assure me that it won't happen again."

"All precautions have been taken," the ship answered in what could not possibly have been a hurt voice because, after all, it was only a machine.

Henry drew another paper cup of water and tapped the tube liner: it rang musically. The robots could install it in an hour, but if he took out the winch and pretended to do it himself he could stretch the operation until dark. He had to find a way to gain more time on the planet; he doubted if he could possibly finish his assignment before the following morning.

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"Tunnel completed," the ship whispered in his ear.

"Good. Get ready. Here I come."

In case he was under observation he played the role broadly. He drank from the cup again and put it down near the edge of the counter. Then he yawned, tapping his mouth with his hand to show that he was yawning, not just seeing how wide he could open his jaw, then stretched widely. When he did this his hand knocked the cup to the ground. He looked down at it, then bent to pick it up. As he did so he was below the level of the counter and out of sight of anyone at the other end of the field.

The back of the counter opened wide and he crawled into it. As he crept into it he pushed past himself and crawled out of it. The he that came out wasn't the same he that went in, but was a humanoid robot whose plastiflesh was modeled after his features, right down to the last dewlap and mole. The robot picked up the paper cup and straightened up, seating itself in the chair. To the uninformed observer Henry was still seated, waiting patiently for business to materialize.

He was doing nothing of the sort. He was climbing down a ladder into a well-lit tunnel some twenty feet under the ground.

"There seems to be a bit of improvement over the tunnel that caved in," he said.

"That is true," the ship said, speaking through the mouth of a small multibot that was holding a sign in its claw hands. There was an arrow painted on the sign, and below the arrow was printed TO THE BURIED SHIP. Henry went in that direction.

It is, of course, impossible for a ship's computer to feel guilt. But perhaps this one felt that it had not performed adequately the previous time when the fused earth tunnel had collapsed at one spot. This tunnel was completely lined with stainless steel plates, welded together and reinforced. The top was high enough so that Henry could walk upright, and inset glow tubes lit his way. Soft music sounded from hidden speakers as he trod on the ridged, slip-proof flooring. This tunnel bent sharply where it entered the main tunnel which had been dug from beneath his ship. A welding robot stepped aside to let him pass, then pointed in the right direction with its torch-tipped arm.

". . . The buried ship . . . is that way—" it said in a flat, monochromatic voice.

"Not bad, not bad at all," Henry said, particularly delighted by a projected photomural of a winter forest that covered one wall. The tunnel ended at the curved metal flank of the buried spaceship, with the air lock neatly centered before him. A heavy-duty robot was leaning on a high-intensity spark drill

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that was eating a hole through the hull.

"You forgot to mention that we had to break in," Henry said.

"You neglected to ask," the ship said, speaking through the drilling robot. "The computer in this ship is of a very low order and incapable of much rational thought. It supplied navigational instructions upon request because it was programmed to do so, but it refuses to open the lock because we do not know the proper keying phrase. It is, therefore, necessary to interrupt its control."

At that moment the drill holed through. The robot ran the bit as far forward as it would go to make sure that the opening was clear, then drew it out. A tiny robot hummed down the corridor from the ship. It was no thicker than a man's finger, and not unlike a mechanical centipede with its numerous legs. A wire trailed behind it and, when it scuttled up the wall of the buried spacer, Henry saw a jewellike TV eye on its front, just over a wicked looking cutting beak. It went straight to the hole and vanished into it, trailing the wire after.

"What's that for?"

"Direct control," the ship answered through the welding robot as it passed on its way back down the tunnel. "I am disconnecting the computer and taking over."

Apparently it was. Within a minute hidden motors hummed and the air lock swung open. Henry found the wire where it came through the hole and followed it to the control room. The tiny cable led to a small inspection hatch that had been pulled from the computer, and he had a quick glimpse of cut wires inside, with the multilegged robot hanging like a mechanical leech from a terminal strip. The air was pure, the ship was clean; there was no sign of human habitation.

"What have you found out?" he asked. The ship's computer answered, though he knew it was his own ship speaking.

"The last entry in the log is over one standard year ago, three hundred seventy-two days to be exact. It reads, 'Landed. 1645 hours.' "

"Not very communicative, our Commander Sergejev. He must have landed, made the log entry, then gone out to begin his survey. And never returned. Is there anything more in the memory bank?"

"Just a series of radio warnings the ship issued, not to molest government property, that was three days after the landing. We may assume that this was when the ship was buried."

"We may. We can guess that something nasty happened to the commander—which must be easy enough on this peace-loving planet. The party or parties concerned couldn't break into the ship—so they buried it to remove the evidence. So, now what?"

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"I would suggest a return to the counter. A vehicle is approaching rapidly."

"Vision!"

The navigation screen lit up as the computer piped in a signal from one of its pickups. There was the familiar dust cloud approaching at its usual headlong pace.

"I'll never get back before they arrive, so let's have the robot stand in this once."

"It is not programmed for more than simple movements and expressions."

"Then cut me into its voice circuit, that should be simple enough."

It was. The humanoid robot sat and grinned as the truck slid to a stop and a group of men got off.

"What will you have, gentlemen?" Henry said. "I stock only the finest of wares."

The computer taped his words and delayed them by 100 milliseconds so it could program the robot's jaw motions to match the sounds. The deception appeared to work because the Slagterans came up to the counter and scowled down at the seated figure. One of them was the sheriff, and the others were built and dressed like him.

"You been asking questions?" the sheriff asked.

"Who . . . me?" Henry answered, and the robot's finger pointed dutifully to its own chest.

"Yes, you. You been asking about Commander Sergejev?"

As he said this, words appeared on the screen over his image, moving smoothly from left to right.

ONE OF THE MEN IS NOW MOVING AROUND BEHIND THE COUNTER . . . HE HAS WHAT APPEARS TO BE A BLUNT WEAPON IN HIS RAISED HAND.

"I don't recall mentioning the name," Henry said, then put his hand over the mike. "If they want to cause trouble—let them. We may find out more that way."

"I think you have," the sheriff said, leaning close. "In fact I know you have."

YOU HAVE BEEN STRUCK ON THE REAR OF THE CRANIUM the moving words said, and the image shifted to show the Henry-robot falling forward across the counter.

"Ohhhhh," Henry moaned, then was silent.

"You are now disconnected," the computer said.

"Let's get some bugs on the truck, lots of them. Complete coverage of facilities and channels."

The Slagterans moved swiftly—almost professionally—in disposing of their supposedly stunned and unconscious prisoner. Two men took the Henry-robot under the armpits and pulled him away from the desk. A third man then grabbed up his ankles and they rushed him to the back of the truck and threw him inside. The sheriff was already in the cab gunning the engine and,

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as the men jumped in and the last foot cleared the ground, he sent the truck leaping ahead. Scant seconds had passed from the bludgeoning to the kidnapping. They had moved fast.

Yet the robots had moved faster. While nerve impulses move at the sluggish rate of three hundred feet per second, electricity travels at the speed of light. Which, at the last reckoning went 186,326 miles in that same second of time. So, while the men were just reaching for the slumped figure, electronic commands had already opened bins and lockers in the ship. By the time the men had picked up their limp burden, hundreds of robots were already rushing to obey commands. The biggest of them was the size of a button, the smallest the size of an ant. And all of them were under the direct control of

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the ship's computer. Down the hollow landing leg they streamed, out through the tunnel and up into the counter. A hatch on the side facing the truck sprang open and the twinkling, scurrying horde rushed out. Some of them climbed up the halftrack treads, others sprang into the body in mighty leaps, while still others energized minuscule jets and flew to their objective. By the time the Slagterans appeared all of the robots were out of sight.

"Get me a view from the front of the truck," Henry said, leaning back in the pilot's chair, prepared to enjoy his own kidnapping in comfort.

The screen before him blurred and cleared, showing a closeup of rushing dirt, much dust, and little else.

"Too low. Don't you have an eye up on the cab?"

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The scene shifted again, to a point farther up the truck, where there was a fine view of the spaceport buildings rushing towards them. The buildings streamed by as the truck turned and tore headlong down a rutted dirt road.

"Their paving leaves a lot to be desired. I can understand now why all their vehicles have treads. I hope that you are taking advantage of this journey to bug all the riders in the truck?"

"This has already been done. At the present moment there are a minimum of six pickups on each individual. That number will be increased dependent upon the length of this present trip."

"The longer the ride, the buggier they get. I wonder where they are headed? They've turned away from town, haven't they?"

"They have."

The road turned and twisted, and suddenly moving forms were visible through the dust ahead. Without slowing speed the sheriff pulled off the road and swung wide through the shrub to avoid the obstacle. The cross-country track was, if anything, smoother than the road, so the pickups presented a clear picture of the herd of milling animals that they passed. Henry looked on in wonderment at the rolling eyes and heaving flanks, at the great spread of needle-sharp horns each animal bore.

"What in the name of sanity are those evil-looking beasts?" Henry asked, and the ship's computer searched the infinite resources of its memory files and produced the answer in a few milliseconds.

"A sub-order of the Earth specie *bos domesticus*. This animal has been back-bred from the common shorthorn beef cattle to recreate the longhorn, once common in a certain portion of Earth titled the United States, particularly a sub-geographical category of mythological interest called Texas. The longhorns originated in Spain—"

"That will do nicely. Any more detail would only give me a headache. So these violent looking beasts must be the basis of Slagter economy. Very interesting. See if you can't plant a bug on that surly individual on the trackycle who is accompanying the flock."

"Flock is the collective term of a group of birds. The correct term applied to cattle is *herd*—"

"Were you working while you gave me the lecture?"

"The ordered operation is complete."

Pens were now visible ahead and then the truck was speeding past great numbers of cattle that had been assembled in separated areas. A road led between the pens and ended at a large and windowless building. The truck made its usual sliding stop and, when the resulting dust cloud had cleared, a group of men were revealed, gathered about a locked door.

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It was the most locked door that Henry had ever seen in his life, and he looked at it with mystified awe. There were a dozen or more hasps set along the edge of the door, from which dangled locks of various sizes and shapes. The reason for this odd construction was only apparent after the newcomers had joined the waiting men for an important discussion. They did not stand close, but rather gathered in a circle, well apart from each other, hands comfortably near the guns that they all wore. An agreement was quickly reached —Henry did not pay attention to the conversation since the computer was recording it and could play it back at any time—and, one by one, they sidled over to the locked door.

And each unlocked a lock, just one lock.

"Not very trusting are they," Henry said. "Apparently every man has a key to his own lock, so they all have to be present to open that door. What secrets can be concealed behind such elaborate precautions?"

"It appears obvious from the location of this building that it contains—"

"Enough. Allow a little mystery in a man's life. You are too-cold-minded and calculating, Computer. Haven't you ever wished to experience the joys of anticipation, fear, doubt, curiosity—?"

"I am perfectly content without them, thank you. The satisfactions of knowledge, and the operations of logic, suffice for a machine."

"Yes, I imagine they do. But our friends are moving. The door is unlocked and they are carrying my pseudo-self inside. Switch to a bug inside so we can see what mysteries lurk there."

The optical pickup must have been located on one of the men's hats, because the picture, though bobbing with his footsteps, was high up and clear.

"A slaughterhouse," Henry said. "Of course."

It was more than just a slaughterhouse; it was a completely automated operation from the time the animals were herded into the pens at the far end of the building. From here the beef cattle were moved with electric prods into separate walkways. Soothing mists of ataraxic, sedative and hypnotic drugs filled the air so that the happy beasts strolled happily into their sunset. Once transformed from beast to beef, instantaneously and painlessly, they were carried forward on sort of a reverse assembly line. Unlike copters or cars, which were assembled from parts and emerged complete, the sides of beef quickly were disassembled to their component parts and whisked off to the freezers. The entire operation was swift, sterile, foolproof —and completely automatic. Not one human being was visible be-

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hind the sealed-glass partition. The disassembly lines moved forward steadily and endlessly without a human hand to guide them.

Yet there had to be some control center where the data storage and operating computers were located, and this appeared to be where the cowboy kidnappers were headed. The sheriff pulled open the heavy bolt that sealed a metal door, and the Henry-robot was carried inside. Not all of the men entered and the screen jumped dizzily as the computer shifted pickups to get a better image.

Things moved fast. The pictured scene flicked back to the first pickup as the men came out and the sheriff sealed the door again. They had left the robot behind.

"What is the point of all this?" Henry asked, and had the answer even as he spoke the words.

The Henry-robot opened its eyes and sat up. Its gaze went down to the fetter secured about its ankle, then along the length of chain that led to a heavy eye bolted to the wall. There were computer components and data storage tanks on all sides, and a door in the far wall through which a man was emerging, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He stopped abruptly when he saw the newcomer.

"At last—one of you alone!" he bellowed, and dived forward. His fingers locked about the Henry-robot's throat and clamped tight. "Release me or I'll kill you!"

The viewscreen, using the robot's eyes as pickups, was filled with the angry face of the newcomer. His large black beard waggled with his exertions and his bald head gleamed. Henry signaled the computer so he could speak through the robot once again.

"Commander Sergejev, I presume."

"You've got a strong neck," Sergejev muttered, squeezing harder although his hands were getting tired.

"Very glad to meet you, Commander, although I would prefer if you shook my hand instead of my neck. If you will look down you will notice that I am a prisoner, chained just as you are, so that throttling me will avail you nothing."

Sergejev dropped his hands and stepped back. There was a chain leading from ankle to the room he had just emerged from.

"Who are you—and what are you doing here?" Sergejev asked.

"My name is Henry Venn, my friends call me Hank, and I am a poor peddler of robust robots, unfairly assaulted by the thugs who inhabit this planet."

"I can almost believe your story—because they got me the same way. But still, there's something funny about your neck—"

Once more computer-printed words moved across the image on the screen.

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ROOMS SEARCHED AND ONLY ONE BUG FOUND . . . THIS HAS BEEN DISCONNECTED AND I AM NOW FEEDING IT SIMULATED INFORMATION FOR THE MEMORY BANK

"Very good," Henry said. "We can lower the disguise for the moment. Stand me up." Commander Sergejev stepped back and raised his fists at the sudden action.

"There is nothing to fear," Henry said, speaking through the robot. "You are Commander Sergejev of the Galactic Census, first reported missing eight standard months ago. I have been sent to locate you."

"Well you have found me all right, but other than that you don't seem to be doing so well."

"Do not let appearances fool you, Commander. My card."

The robot opened its mouth and reached in to extract an identity card which it handed to the man.

"That's a good trick," he said. "It's not even wet."

"There is no reason for it to be. What you are speaking to now is a robot duplicate of myself. I am at the spaceport. If you will be so kind as to examine the card—"

"R.O.B.O.T.! What is that supposed to mean? This stupid robot with the big mouth gives me a card saying it is a robot!"

"Read the fine print below, if you please," Henry said patiently.

Sergejev read slowly.

"Robot Obtrusion Battalion—Omega Three. Henry Venn, Commanding Officer." He looked around suspiciously. "So where is the battalion? What kind of a joke is this?"

"No joke at all. I can assume that you have access to classified documents in your work as a senior officer of the Galactic Census?"

"If I do, I'm not telling you."

"There is no need. You will know that the Patrol cannot possibly handle all the problems of law enforcement that arise within the sphere of influence. Most of the planets settled by humans do a good job of policing themselves—but not all of them. The Patrol has more calls for aid than it can possibly handle with its present number of armed spacecraft. Nor is armed threat always the answer to every problem. Therefore, a number of other special units are being activated."

"Yes, I've heard about P.I.G., the Porcine Interstellar Guard. You don't have any pigs with you, do you?" Sergejev asked, hopefully. "You can't beat pigs for taking care of a tough job."

"Sorry, no pigs, but I think you will find that R.O.B.O.T. will do its job equally well. I work alone, but I am aided by the most sophisticated computers, detectors, apparatus and—"

"Read me the inventory later. Get me out of here first."

"Soon, Commander, soon,"

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Henry said, soothingly. "But isn't there a little problem to be solved first? Like why you have been made a prisoner—and what you are doing here? I can take you out of here easily enough, but the planetary situation remains unchanged."

"Let it!" Sergejev paced back and forth, his chain clanking behind him. "This planet is a rustic dead end and it should remain that way. A perversion of the go-it-alone frontier spirit, where every man is an individualist and will kill everyone else to prove it."

"It doesn't sound healthy," Henry mused.

"Who cares? The Forbrugeners don't care—and this planet used to belong to them. They originally settled it as a colony. They are the fourth planet from this sun, the next one out."

"I know. I traced you that far. They told me you had come here to Slagter even though they had warned you not to."

"I should have listened. But I took my Census Oath seriously then. That was before I was locked up in this slaughterhouse for a year. After the pressures of the highly industrialized life on Forbrugen, the settlers that came here were happy to make a new way of life for themselves. They have almost completely cut themselves off from their parent world and have created a society which, I am forced to admit, is about the nastiest I have ever encountered in my sixty-seven years of census service."

"Please tell me about it."

"How much do you know already?" Sergejev asked, still suspicious. His imprisonment in the mechanized meat market had done nothing good for his humor.

"Just the surface facts. Forbrugen is a highly mechanized world and Slagter performs a very important role in its economy. This planet is ideal for the raising of beef cattle, and apparently nothing else is done here. The beef is frozen, loaded into cargo shells, then lifted into orbit by space tugs. The unmanned shells are launched into an orbit by the tugs, towards the future position of Forbrugen. These interplanetary meatlockers take anywhere from six to ten months for the trip, depending upon the relative position of the planets. The length of the journey doesn't matter because there are always a number of cargoes in the pipeline. About the time one is launched here another is picked up and slowed by tugs at the other end. A steady supply of meat is always on hand."

"Do you know about the treaty?"

"Yes. The Slagterans load the meat into the shells and their responsibility ends there. The Forbrugen ships deliver all the consumer goods that are needed here,

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pick up the full shells, return the empty ones—and never set foot on the planet's surface. They supply all the consumer goods the Slagterans need, but otherwise have no contact with them at all."

"Correct!" Sergejev shouted, and paced back and forth, his chain rattling and clanking behind him. "But that is only an outside view. I have lived with the reality of these exponents of free enterprise run wild, the ultimate extreme of laissez-faire. The people here are incredibly selfish, completely untrusting, and fantastically lazy. They herd their beasts and feud with each other—and that is the whole of their lives. The Forbrugeners built this completely automated and self-repairing packing planet—and the locals are too busy to even watch it themselves. Instead they capture me, a complete stranger, and imprison me here to watch the machinery."

"You didn't refuse?"

"Of course I refused!" Sergejev roared. "So they didn't bring me any food. Now I cooperate. It is an idiot's job in any case, merely watching the dials. The machines do everything, everything. Now you will release me and we will leave this place forever."

"Soon, soon," Henry said, and the computer matched his soothing voice with a warm grin on the robot. "You're in no danger here and as soon as my investigation is complete we will leave—"

"Now! Now!" Sergejev thundered.

"You must understand that I have a responsibility to the people here as well as to you. And you are just making yourself more angry by choking this robot; it accomplishes nothing. The first O in R.O.B.O.T. stands for *obtrusion*—and that is what we do. We poke our noses in where we are not wanted. There is something very wrong with this planet and I intend to find out what it is. You will be safe where you are until my mission is accomplished. It should not take more than a few days—"

"You leave me here alone. You *sveenya, sabahkah, gloopwy . . .*"

"My, what a fine command of your native tongue you still have after all your years of travel! You won't be lonely since this robot will stay hooked through to my computer. It can sing you songs, read books. You'll have a jolly time until I check back."

Henry quickly cut the circuit since Commander Sergejev was still bellowing, and a number of the words were familiar now.

"Three vehicles are approaching the ship," the computer announced.

"Seal the tunnel leading to the counter, load the counter back aboard the ship and lock the hatch. The water cooler and other odd items are expendable."

"It shall be done as you say."

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Henry left the buried ship and trod a slow and thoughtful course back to his own ship. His brow furrowed in concentration, so he neither saw the chill beauty of the snowy mural nor heard the melodic rhythms of the background music. The tunnel that had formerly terminated under the counter had been filled in, and a welding robot was sealing a plate over the entrance when he passed. A one-man elevator was waiting where the tunnel terminated and, as soon as he stepped into it, it moved smoothly up through the ground and the hollow landing leg, up into the ship.

Henry dropped into his chair before the console in the control room and threw a switch. The screen flickered to life and he had a fine picture from a pickup high on the hull. The arm was just loading the last of the goods into the ship and the lock was closing. At the same moment the three tracked vehicles were sliding to a stop on the sand below; one of them neatly demolishing his water cooler. Men jumped out and there were flashes of light as they fired up at the ship. Somewhere, on the hull below, he could hear the ping of projectile against metal hull. They would have to mount heavier weapons than this if they were to make any impression on the ship. Some of the men put their heads together to confer, then boarded their vehicles and rushed away.

"Always in a hurry," Henry said. "Gone away to think up more mischief I suppose." He brooded. "And I have been thinking, too. There is something very wrong with this planet."

The ship, since no question had been put to it, did not answer, but listened quietly, its patient breath the whispered exhalation of the air purifier. Henry looked glumly through the ports at the sun setting over the dusty plain.

"I'm hungry," he said. "Give me food for my thoughts. Steak, some of the Slagter beef we picked up on Forbrugen. It should be aged well after its multi-million mile round trip."

"Medium rare, green salad with garlic dressing, garlic bread, and a bottle of the best red wine."

"All fine, except nix the garlic. It will spoil my public image if I have to talk to anyone—and will give me away in the dark if you want a more practical reason."

The sun slipped behind the horizon before a showy backdrop of purples, red-golds, and greens as dinner arrived. Henry ate and drank well, and the weight of good food in his stomach drew deep thoughts from his brain.

"Though our friend, the good Commander Sergejev, has been over a year on this planet, I still think that his observations are wrong. This place is far more complex than he thinks it is. Do your

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voluminous records contain any indication of his past history?"

"They do. Before transferring to the Galactic Census he was in Patrol, a cruiser commander, invalided out with wounds, and over age."

"Fine! A rough, tough soldier with little interest in sociology, anthropology, exobiology or any other of the fine ologies that make the wheels go round. We shall ignore the commander's observations and make some of our own. There are factors to this society that are very puzzling. Just think about them. Why do the children avoid the adults so continuously and well? Not children—just boys. Not girls, and there have been no women in sight. Why? And why all the individual locks on the slaughterhouse door?"

"I do not have enough material in my records to answer any of those questions."

"Then we'll get some more facts. Let's look at one of their homes first. I assume that you have been recording all the information from the robot that was purchased as a bodyguard?"

"I have."

"Show me his master's home, inside and out."

The picture on the screen flowed evenly towards them as they approached a building with a blank front. Not completely blank. Although it had no windows it was pierced by narrow openings not unlike gun slits. Perhaps they were. The robot followed his purchaser around behind the building where a deep-set entrance was protected by a thick wall. The man leaned close to an opening beside a steel-bound and riveted door.

"Sound," Henry ordered.

"The stream it flows," the man said.

"The grass it grows," another voice answered from the opening and the door ground slowly open.

"Password and countersign," Henry said. "That's more like a fortress than a home."

It was. There was an arms rack inside the door that held automatic weapons and drums of ammunition, as well as a grenade dispenser. In a guided tour of the house Henry saw the controls for a complex burglar alarm and detection system, reserves of food, water and compressed oxygen—in case the building was sealed against gas attack—as well as a portable generator for emergency power. Even more interesting was the tantalizing glimpse of a woman and two young girls seen through a rapidly closing door. They seemed to keep themselves apart from the main section of the house, and the master of the establishment did not enter their sector.

"Stranger and stranger," Henry mused. "It is time to do a little firsthand investigating. Do you think you can get me inside that fortress-cum-dwelling without raising the alarm?"

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"A simple task. The robot can easily handle the alarm systems."

"Then let's move. Roll out a unicycle and fly cover with the spyeyes."

"You will want a combat robot for protection?"

"I will not. Those things are as quiet as a collapsing landing leg. I'll count upon my speed and your intelligence network to keep me out of trouble." He rose, clamped the derby on his head, and left.

There was a concealed exit from the hollow landing leg that was less obvious than opening one of the hatches. The unicycle was waiting, standing upright and humming expectantly. This was a one-wheeled, or rather one-globed, vehicle that was held balanced upright by an internal gyroscope. The sphere on which it moved was soft, resilient and silent, and made only the slightest whisper of sound as he moved off into the darkness. Before and behind him the spyeyes flew invisible guard.

"What's the news from town?" Henry asked.

"As of this moment six of the bugs have been destroyed by accident; none of them has been detected. Forty-three different individuals are now under constant observation. There is a large ditch ahead, I suggest you veer slightly to the right."

"Give me a guide then, it's a dark night. Shortest and best route to town. What is the sheriff doing?"

A dim green light appeared in the air ahead of him as one of the spyeyes swooped low to guide him. He followed it. The computer spoke again, through the tiny receiver pressed to the bone behind his ear.

"He is now eating dinner with a woman he refers to as 'wife'. There is something strange about this meal."

"Exotic eating habits? If it's too awful, don't tell me."

"I do not mean that, but in the manner in which the meal is served. All the dishes are in covered pots. The sheriff first served wife from each of them, then sat, uneating as she ate. When she had tasted each dish in turn she passed the plate to him and he is now finishing it."

"Nothing strange about that at all. Flip through your index and look up food-tasters, Old Earth."

"I see what you mean," the computer answered, after the briefest of intervals. "He is afraid of being poisoned, so eats only food that someone else has tasted and not suffered ill effects. Please slow your vehicle and be prepared to turn left. I shall guide you through the quietest streets to the place you seek—STOP."

The unicycle skidded and shuddered to a stop, its gyro whinning to hold it upright, as Henry hit the brakes.

"Would you mind telling me why?" he whispered.

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"There are three people waiting around the corner of that building. They are obviously in hiding and are observing the ship. There is one woman and two children. One of them is the boy referred to as Robbie whom you conversed with earlier today. The other is a girl of approximately the same age."

"Any guns in sight? I remember the boy was looking for one."

"No weapons are detectable."

"All right. Hook me through to a speaker in a spyeye and bring it close to them."

"Ready. It is hovering over their heads."

"Hi, down there. This is Henry Venn speaking. Did you want to see me?"

Muffled shrieks and a grunt of surprise echoed in Henry's receiver, then a woman's voice spoke. "Where are you—I can't see you?"

"Close by, speaking by radio Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, please, it is very important." Even through the radio linkage he could detect the strain in her voice.

"I'll be right with you."

They were waiting, huddled in the shadows, with the boy standing protectively in front.

"This is not my idea," he said, stepping forward, his fists clenched. "I'm not even sure I like it. But my mother said she was going to go anyway, so I had to come. Keep an eye on her, you know."

"I do indeed. And very right, too. I'm very pleased to meet you, madam," Henry said, tipping his hat in his most courtly manner.

"You must help me. When you leave this planet you must take my son and daugther to Forbrugen with you. They'll be expected there."

"I won't go," the boy said firmly. "But Kitt can go, that's all right."

Slagter's inner moon had risen and it cast a faint light into the shadows below the wall. Kitt was a teen-ager like her brother, a few years older perhaps, nearer fifteen. She looked very much like her mother, a handsome woman with pale skin and long, dark hair.

"What do you say about all this, Kitt?" Henry asked.

"It's so far away, I know I shall never come back. I don't want to leave Mother but . . . at the same time . . . I know she's right." The girl was close to tears.

"Of course I'm right, you know that, you have eyes," her mother said. She stepped close and looked up at Henry. "You're an off-worlder so I can talk to you. You'll never believe what it means to be a woman on this planet. It's not hard—but it's like being in prison. My daughter can escape this. I've been secretly in touch with the authorities on Forbrugen. They assure me that this planet has a credit reserve there that they will

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apply to educational scholarships for any Slagter children. They are very much in favor of the idea. Will you do it?" There was naked appeal in her eyes.

"It might be arranged, though I am not leaving at once. And there are complications—"

"Take cover!" a spyeye warned, swooping low. "Vehicles approaching, gunfire."

They dived for shelter, Henry pulled his unicycle after him, as the first crackle of shots was heard. Crouched low, Henry watched the two halftracks roar towards them out of the night. Headlights flared and bobbed and the engines roared. The drivers were apparently driving with one hand and shooting with the other—which helped neither their driving nor their accuracy. Bullets splatted and whined as the vehicles rushed by and vanished around a bend. The popping and banging died away into the distance.

Henry rose and looked around, and discovered that he was alone. A spyeye dived close. "They have returned home," it said. "I can lead you to the building."

"Not now. We have some more pressing business first. I'm going to interview a Slagteran on his home ground and get some answers to my questions. Blink your little taillight at me and lead on."

The spyeye swooped away while Henry started up his unicycle and followed it.

"The next building on the right," the computer whispered into his ear.

"I recognize it. Now what's the drill?"

"The robot has disconnected the alarms on the front door and has placed a radio-operated relay in the door-opening circuit. When you reach the door I will open it."

"Watch the bike," he said, standing it in a dark corner and

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switching off the motor. "I have no idea how long this will take."

Henry approached the door, which opened silently as he came near.

At the same moment the world exploded into noise and sound. With a great roar the wall of the building just across the street blew outward in a shower of debris and a halftrack roared out straight towards Henry: its headlights pinned him like a bug against the wall. Guns began firing and bullets splatted into the wall above his head.

First one, then the other headlight went out, and the halftrack careened out of control. Henry leaped back as it crashed into the wall close to him.

The shooting continued. More vehicles were charging in now and gunfire rolled like thunder. An answering fire began from the house and something exploded in the roadway with a great booming,

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sending out a spout of flame. The door was closed again—and undoubtedly locked—so Henry dived for his unicycle and jumped into the saddle.

But he had turned it off, and the gyro had already slowed down. It started forward slowly, emitting a horrible rattling moan, weaving and tilting like a bucking broncho. Henry fought for control and managed to wobble erratically into the street and point the thing away from the fair-sized battle that was raging behind him. As the motors picked up speed the unicycle straightened up and began to roll faster.

"Fast is still not fast enough," he shouted, holding his hat down so it wouldn't blow away. "And, ever-watchful, robot-of-a-thousand eyes, would you mind telling me what all this is about? Sort of took us by surprise, didn't it?"

"I'm very sorry, but it is impossible to know everything . . ."

"You always talk like you do!"

". . . Or to examine every building. It appears now that person or persons unknown were concealed in that building. They had the one you were about to enter under observation. Their plan was obviously to force entrance when next the door was opened. It appears that, just by chance, you became involved."

"Did they break in?"

"No. I crashed a spyeye into each headlight and the attack missed the door in the darkness. There are other vehicles involved, and I regret to say that one of them is now following you."

"I was wondering when you would notice that," Henry growled, turning the power full on, chasing his own shadow that was thrown by powerful headlights behind him. "Can you knock his lights out?"

"I have only two spyeyes in the vicinity and I need one to keep contact." A headlight vanished as the words vibrated in Henry's head. "But the other was expendable. Might I suggest a turn as soon as possible, since there is another vehicle approaching ahead to cut you off. I am monitoring their radio contact."

"Jam it!"

"I have already done that, but the other party knows your location and direction."

Headlights flared ahead, rushing towards him.

"I would suggest the next right turning," the computer said. Henry twisted the handlebars. "No! Not this one—"

The wall loomed up ahead, his brakes squealed, he jumped free and rolled as the unicycle slammed into the solid bricks. He came out of the roll, dizzy, bruised, right up against the wall, with the computer's last words ringing in his head.

". . . Not this one. It's a dead-end alley. The next turning."

"You're just a little late with that information," he gritted be-

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tween his aching teeth as he ran, stumbling, pushing up against the brim of his hat which had been jammed down over his eyes. A halftrack slid to a stop, blocking the alley mouth, and two men jumped down.

One was busy swatting at the spyeye which buzzed about its head. The other took a roundhouse swing at Henry. Henry ducked under the punch, put the heel of his hand under the other's chin and his foot behind the man's ankle—and pushed. His opponent slammed down into the dirt and Henry ran on.

Another halftrack was there, with more men, and the spyeyes had not yet arrived. In spite of their numbers, and his debilitated condition, Henry gave a good account of himself. He had been a Patrol Marine before this assignment and his carefully cultivated layer of fat covered some impressive musculature. But the odds just weren't right. Three men were lying on the ground, moaning or unconscious, before the fourth got behind him with a length of pipe and completed the ruin of his derby hat.

Henry groaned, opened his eyes, did not like anything that he saw, groaned again and closed them.

"Explain what has happened!" Commander Sergejev said, bending over so close that his beard brushed Henry's nose.

"Away with the jungle," Henry answered, brushing feebly at the thing. "Tell me what you know while I make up my mind whether to live or die, and I'll fill in the rest of the details."

"Bah. You let yourself be captured. Now we will rot in this automated slaughterhouse forever."

"Patience. Try not to shout. I'll get you out of here—but just tell me what happened."

"You know what happened, or that robot that looks like you knows what happened. I could not sleep, that creature never sleeps, so we were having a game of chess. When, suddenly, it leaps to its feet —on purpose spilling the pieces because I would have mate in four —and tears its leg chain loose from the wall. If I had known it could have done that, I would have forced it to release me long before this. Then it climbs to the top of the memory storage units and hides itself. While I am shouting at it, the door bursts open and they bring you in, looking like this. In a moment you are chained again, or for the first time, *Nyeboh!* you know what I mean, and they leave. And now your filthy robot ignores me completely, and is up there chopping a tiny hole in the wall. Madness!"

Henry looked up at himself, the robot self, hanging upside down by its legs just below the high ceiling, digging a hole in the wall with a length of steel. Dizzy, he closed

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his eyes again and groaned histrionically.

"I need a doctor," he said.

"Help is on the way," the robot called down, and poked the hole through. As soon as the hole was clear a spyeye zoomed through and flashed down to the floor next to Henry. Its silver, birdlike shape, hovered, humming expectantly, while a hatch slowly opened in its back. The robot dropped all the way back to the floor with a jarring thud and ran over. It pulled a package from the spyeye—which swooped up and out the opening again.

"A medical kit," the robot said. "I will now tend your wounds."

"Pain-killer first, you short-circuited excuse for a computer," Henry said. "And then an explanation."

The shot did its work instantly and, while the robot dressed his bruises and contusions, it explained.

"Stopping the men was out of the question since all I had were minor units in the vicinity. But I did succeed in preventing them from killing you, bugs in their weapons made them inoperable, and I ceased all operations as soon as you were unconscious and in their hands. I reasoned that you would be brought back here since this is where you were taken in the first place. I reasoned correctly."

"And if you had thought wrong—?"

"I was prepared for all eventualities," the computer answered with mechanical self-assurance. "By that time heavy units had been dispatched." Since some of the heavy units carried atomic weapons the self-assurance appeared justified.

Henry moved and sat up, and no longer had the feeling that he was going to fall to pieces when he did so.

"We leave here now!" Sergejev said, his fingers making twitching, throat-crushing motions.

"Yes, I guess so. We certainly can't accomplish very much chained in this butchershop control room. But—patience. Give me a few moments to rally my vital forces."

"Ten minutes you have, no more!" Sergejev began to pace the room, glancing at his watch.

"You are the soul of generosity, Commander. How your men must have loved you."

"Perhaps they did, but they never told me. As long as they obeyed I was satisfied."

"You would never make a crewman out of anyone from this planet. I have never seen so many suspicious, single-minded people in all my life. The children seem normal enough, and the women, if you can call being in purdah normal. But the men! Treacherous, suspicious, murderous—pick your adjective. Perhaps the Forbrugeners were right when they said that the peo-

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ple here were just carried away by the frontier life and developed this kill and be-killed culture. They won't ship any powerful energy weapons here, and only a limited amount of explosive weapons. They have to send some or their prime source of protein would be cut off. It is a dilemma that appears not to have an easy solution. They are ingrained in their way of life here—and it is almost impossible to change all the mores of a society."

"Why change? Leave! Let them have their cows and dust and guns. They're mad, all of them, mad."

Henry's eyes widened and he sat suddenly bolt upright. "What did you say?"

"You heard what I said, mad. Now we go, time is up."

Henry swung his feet to the floor and slowly stood. "Maybe if they were all mentally ill it would explain a lot of things. I may have been looking for the wrong reasons—"

"No violence, if you please, Commander," the Henry-robot said, stepping between Henry and the angry census man, who was advancing with hands outstretched and fingers twitching.

"We're leaving, Commander, relax," Henry said, bringing his attention back to the affairs at hand. "Ship, I presume you can get us out of this building?"

"A simple affair," the robot answered, bending over Henry's ankle chain. "If you would be so kind as to follow me, gentlemen."

With an easy snap it broke the chain off close to Henry's ankle, then did the same for Sergejev. They followed it to the door from the room—which it crashed through without slowing down. The two men stepped through the wreckage and followed the robot through the hallways to the outer door.

"It won't break that thing down as easily," Sergejev said, pointing at the thick, steel reinforced beams of the door.

"If you will kindly step to one side," the robot said, pointing, and when they did so the entire door blew in, sending splinters and twisted bits of metal crashing into the far wall. They went out of the blasted opening to see a heavy-duty robot with an energy cannon mounted where its head should be. Its eyes and mouth were in its abdomen.

"I suggest a speedy withdrawal," it said. "Alarms have been triggered by your escape and it appears as if *all* the men in the city have been aroused and are on their way."

With this encouragement they ran, robots and men, through the thick darkness. Clouds covered the moon and stars, and the Slagterans did not believe in street lights. Warned by the ubiquitous bug and spyeye robots they hid, turned aside, and sought cover to avoid

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the vehicles and men who were searching for them. When they finally reached the edge of the spaceport they saw the spaceship at the far end—surrounded by trucks and halftracks. Searchlights and headlights lit up the surrounding area as bright as day. Henry slid to a stop, panting heavily, and leveled an accusing finger at the nearest robot.

"Don't pretend you didn't know about this. Saving the news of this welcome party as a little surprise?"

"No. I did not inform you for the sake of your morale, judging that the news that the ship was surrounded might be depressing and interfere with your efficiency in flight."

"I'll impair your efficiency!" Sergejev shouted and kicked the robot in the ankle, which accomplished no more than to send shooting pains through his own foot.

"How do we get to the ship?" Henry asked.

"Follow me. The commander's buried ship is almost outside the ring of guards, and I am angling a second tunnel up to ground level in a protected area. You may enter that way."

"We have no other choice. Let's go, Commander."

.

The lights were strong and they completed the last one hundred yards crawling on their bellies through a shallow ditch. They were exhausted, filthy, and soaked with sweat, before they rolled into a gully cut by the rain.

"We have arrived," the Henry-robot said. "If you will wait a few moments, please, the tunnel will hole through. In the meantime I would suggest absolute silence because units have detected an individual with a gun who is close by and coming in this direction."

"Can we capture him without raising the alarm?" Henry asked.

"That is possible. Please remain where you are—and silent.

They huddled against the dirt of the bank as heavy footsteps came close and a figure appeared above them, outlined against the glare around the ship. He had a revolver ready in one hand, and he shaded his eyes with the other as he tried to peer into the blackness below.

The Henry-robot reached up, with the slashing speed of a snake, and seized the searcher by both ankles. Before the man could cry out or raise his gun he was crashing down into the gully next to them.

As he went by Henry hit him soundly on the point of the jaw. When he touched the ground he kept going, folding silently, unconscious. His face turned up towards the light from the sky and Henry cried out joyfully.

"Our old friend the sheriff! I could ask for no better subject."

There was a rumble and grinding next to them and the shining metal

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of a whirling drill blade broke through the surface. An instant later the bulk of the drilling robot had crawled out of the raw hole in the ground and stood, vibrating, on its wide treads.

"Into the tunnel with haste," the Henry-robot advised. "I will drag the sheriff after you. I must advise that this tunnel is not reinforced and has a duration expectancy of between three and four minutes before the roof collapses."

"You and your cheap tunnels!" Henry shouted, diving for the opening. Sergejev was right behind him. As soon as his feet had vanished from sight the Henry-robot crawled in, hauling the limp body of the sheriff, with the drilling robot just behind him. In a moment they were gone and the combat robot remained alone, on guard.

It was not much fun. On hands and knees the roof of the tunnel brushed Henry's back as he crawled. It was black and airless and he had been close to exhaustion when he started the mad crawl. There seemed to be no end to it and he felt the weight of all the dirt pressing down on him, collapsing on him, and he knew he would never make it.

And then the tunnel bent upwards and flattened out and he saw light ahead. He reached the opening into the reinforced tunnel with his last strength and collapsed in the opening. A waiting robot pulled him clear, then turned to extract the commander like a cork from a bottle. The Henry-robot was next and it had pulled the sheriff halfway out of the hole when the tunnel collapsed. The other two men could only sprawl, exhausted, while the robots dug him free.

"I thought that perhaps you would like a cold beer," another robot said, appearing out of the connecting tunnel. It carried a tray with two steins and two frosted bottles of foaming beer. "Do you think the commander would like to join you?"

The commander growled something indistinguishable as he lurched out and grabbed one of the bottles. He scorned the glass and raised the bottle to his lips, and half drained it before he lowered it, gasping. Henry drank his in a slightly more leisurely manner.

"Your ship is right here, Commander," he said. "Buried but safe and sound. Would you care to join me in mine until we can get it unearthed?"

The escape and the beer had improved the commander's mood considerably.

"I will be happy to join you. I have had enough of being underground for the moment, if you don't mind."

"I couldn't agree more."

They rose, groaning, and went down the tunnel to the ship. Before Henry cleaned up and put on

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a fresh coverall he turned the sheriff over to the ship with precise instructions. He had his feet up, was reading a computer printout report, and eating a sandwich, when Sergejev joined him.

"Sit down and order what you like, Commander," he said, waving towards a chair. "I'm glad to see the ship could find something your size to wear."

"Size yes, fabric no. Nothing except the same hideous check that you wear." He looked through a menu that a robot handed to him. "What is that very official looking report you have there?"

"The answer to the Slagter problem. The sheriff has a goodly quantity of DMPE, or taraxein as it is sometimes called, in his blood. Analysis has revaled its source."

The commander indicated his choices, handed the menu back, and looked up at Henry, scowling, his old self again. "Are you mad?" he said.

"No, but the sheriff is. Certifiably mentally ill, on any planet except this one. Do you know what paranoid schizophrenia is?"

"A form of mental illness. But what is the connection?"

"The sheriff has it. The paranoid lives in his own world, knowing and trusting only himself. In one particular form of the disease the victim is subject to delusions of persecution. He believes that the whole world is against him. He may appear rational in all other ways except this one. Just because a person is insane does not mean that he has to be stupid."

"Are you trying to tell me that you . . ."

"Exactly. Every man on this planet is a certified hospital case. Paranoia was once thought to be of a strictly psychological order, stemming from childhood conflicts and such like. Eventually it was discovered that these events are only the trigger that sets off the illness that is frankly chemical in origin. It is an abnormality of the brain chemistry. DMPE is an antibody, generated by the body mechanisms in response to foreign material. The trouble with DMPE is that it is not only injurious to the invading organism, but to the brain itself."

The commander gaped. "Do you mean to tell me that this . . . DMPE, whatever you call it . . . is making the men mentally sick, so that they act the way they do? If so, where is the DMPE coming from?"

"The computer is still making microanalysis, but it has already found a microorganism that appears to be responsible. This is a single-celled and very weak bacteria that apparently invades the body tissues very slowly. But these forms of infection can be the worst kind, like leprosy, because their action is so slight the body cannot rally its defenses against the organism. So the microorganism per-

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sists, slowly, getting stronger, while the body fights back, eventually producing enough DMPE to cause the secondary mental disease."

"How long?"

"It must be thirteen to fifteen years, because the children don't have the symptoms. But there is a boy here of about fifteen, who obviously is on the way."

"And the girls and women?"

"They must be naturally immune, that's the most logical explanation, because the microorganism is everywhere on this planet."

"Then we'll catch it!"

"Relax, of course we will. But it takes fifteen years to show any effects, remember. It will be licked in a matter of months now that we know what to look for. Medical teams will come here from Forbrugen and take things in hand."

Sergejev grabbed a sandwich which the robot brought in and took an immense bite, then waved the remainder at Henry. "That is the hole in your argument. If this disease is so widespread, then it must be in the meat, and how come it never spread to Forbrugen."

"Simple enough. Long exposure at below freezing conditions will kill almost any organism after a matter of months. The meat is shipped from here frozen, and is months in space. There is no other contact with the surface of this planet."

"It makes sense," Sergejev grudgingly admitted, finishing the last crumbs of his sandwich and sending the robot out for a second. "In which case I must stay here after my ship is dug out. These people are sick, and they will be cured. And when they are cured I will count them for the Galactic Census and my job will be done."

"It will be a better life for all of them. The children can go away to schools on Forbrugen and when they return build a reasonable society here rather than this strange one." He smiled wryly. "That is surely an impressive thought."

"What?" Commander Sergejev asked, more interested in the sandwich and bottle of beer that was coming his way.

"The children. I imagine kids everywhere rebel when they're young, look down on the older generations, and even think that their parents are crazy for having the ideas they do.

"But here on Slagter—the kids are right!" ■

(continued from page 119)

This leads to a nice question: How can the teacher leave his half-educated pupils without making them feel helpless and deserted? He can't just steal away in the night, leaving them forlorn and helpless . . . Or . . . maybe that's exactly how he could do it, but without that result . . . ?

■ THE EDITOR.

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the empty balloon

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Of course a thought-reading machine would be the ultimate answer to any security agent's dearest dream . . .

JACK WODHAMS

Illustrated by Leo Summers

It seemed so ridiculous for them to ask him questions while he had his mouth taped shut.

"What are the names of your chief contacts?" A long pause. Vanstead's lips and jaw were so efficiently secured that he could barely emit a grunt.

Clucka! Next question. "Where are your information clearinghouses located?" Vanstead rolled his eyes under blindfolding pads. Strapped to some kind of cot, he could feel the many light fingers of a form of cap that was rigidly bound to his head. Thinking deeply, he breathed fast and waited, waited for the next question.

Clucka! "What special projects have you currently been engaged upon?" And Vanstead thought. And Vanstead thought.

"Well, Doctor?" Tils queried. "Were you able to make the anticipated interpretation?"

"Yes," Dr. Schreuler said, "but, ah, you may find that the information gained is not as rewarding as you may have hoped. Of course,

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there may be something there that I have missed—something that I am not trained to look for."

"Yes, yes." Tils rubbed his hands. "You have a transcript? Good. I do not have to impress upon you the urgency of this matter, Doctor. Already their Embassy has lodged a complaint, and their clamor will doubtless grow stronger. We have at most forty-eight hours to establish Vanstead's participation in subversive activities. Now then." He began to read the first page of the report.

Avid interest slowly gave way to a frown. After a few minutes perusal, Tils struck the papers with the knuckles of his free hand. "What is this? He is not answering the questions!"

"Hm-m-m, well, yes. The mind does not necessarily answer questions in the manner demanded by speech. The, ah, question itself first tends to be questioned, and the answer, ah, reserved upon judgment. This is rather different from the voluntary experimentation the unit has undergone hitherto. As a first undeniably uncooperative test case, the reaction could not be foreseen. Had we had a little more time . . ."

"You were eager to make practical demonstration on a suitable case, weren't you? So you've been given one. And what have we got?" Tils gazed at the report. "Question: What special projects have you currently been engaged upon? Answer: Questions, questions. The thing on my head. It makes no sense. I can't speak. I can't speak. Why questions? Not a thought machine? But it can't be. It can't be. What else? It does not make sense. It can't be. I don't believe it. But what else?"

Tils raised his shoulders. "He doesn't even consider the question he has been asked."

"Plainly laboratory testing with subjects performing prescribed readings and having acquiescent responses for the purposes of correlation have not adequately prepared us for any form of resistance. This is very interesting . . ."

"*Phfaph!* Look at these words!" Tils threw the report onto his desk. "Is that what was really going through his mind? Did he pay no attention to the questions at all?"

"That is the sense that emerged from the evaluation of his patterns. We . . ."

"It would have been better to have had his answers by word-of-mouth. At least they would have been pertinent, even though they were all lies."

"This, as I have explained," Schreuler said patiently, "at this time causes inseparable domination of the articulate mind by the vocalizing mechanism, which occasions virtually identical replies. At least," he said in sudden doubt, "it does in control subjects."

"But he seemed to guess that his mind was being read. What does he

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say here?" Tils picked up the report once more and riffled. "Here. Question: What is your government's true purpose behind the Nallenheim affair? Answer: They can't be reading my mind. How? Maybe. Suppose they are? Nuts. It is crazy. No. But they are. It can't be done. Never. That clunking. Questions. Get it in sections. Useful. Somehow. They are. Are. Have to think. Think. What to think. What do they get? Pictures? Words? It makes no sense."

Again Tils threw the report down in disgust. "Ha! Not the least hint that he gives a damn about the question. Rambling all over the place."

"We can only gather what he conjures to his mind moment by moment. He is an intelligent man," Schreuler said diffidently, "and he seems to have taken a sharp subjective interest in his condition."

"That's a great lot of help to us, isn't it?" Tils cried. "He has a mind that we are certain is stocked with valuable and critical knowledge. I have taken risk to create this golden opportunity to invade that mind, and what do I get? *Phoof!*" Tils gestured disparagingly. "This! Him already drawing accurate conclusions about our new technique."

"If we had had more time . . ."

"He was brought here that *he* might divulge information to us," Tils snapped. "We can only hold him temporarily on this passport charge. We *must* have something more concrete to hold him with, an authentic verifiable and indisputable breach of conduct. We *know* that his mind is a storehouse of clandestine knowledge and political manipulation."

"We can make another try . . ."

"Like this?" Tils snorted. "Next time it would be worse. He would be prepared."

"Perhaps if we phrased the questions more cunningly, obliquely, he might be led to reveal more. More rapid questioning might help also by triggering inadvertent responses, although this will require strict sequential observance."

"No," Tils said. "No, we haven't the time. Already we have discovered that this is not as straightforward as it should be. We do not want a vague item here and there. We want factual evidence in quantity that can speedily be corroborated."

"Yes, over a period we could doubtless . . ."

"I understood that the instrument read minds. It seemed a godsend. It would make everything so simple. And what do we get?" Tils asked. "Rubbish!"

"While we can read the verbalizing of the mind, we cannot control to any great degree what the mind constructively thinks at any given time. More research is obviously needed with obdurate persons to learn the means whereby they may be encouraged to think along desired lines."

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"You should have thought of that before and told me," Tils complained. "Now we are committed. So. We shall make another endeavor, and to ensure Mr. Vanstead's attention, this time we shall apply also a little old-fashioned pressure as well. Come."

"Ah," Schreuler hesitated, "if by the application of old-fashioned pressure you mean the inducement of pain, I'd like to point out that acute physical distress plays havoc with the readings and renders them completely useless."

"Oh. Oh." Tils stopped. "Oh, it does, does it? Ah. That wipes that out then, doesn't it? Ha. What else then? We'll have to use drugs."

"Well, ah, we haven't fully explored the relationship between drugs and responses recorded, but the evidence suggests that the combination could be disadvantageous rather than otherwsie."

"Oh, yes? Very helpful, aren't you? And why should that be? Drugged think is still think, isn't it?"

"The selection of the emissions pertinent to word formulation is a very tenuous specific. The motor, sensory and imaging faculties simultaneously emit and convey, and the wavelength patterns naturally overlap. There is an intermittence in word conception that causes the minor interruptions that typify the speech channel. It is these gaps in fact which help us to identify sound-patterning rhythms."

"Save me the lecture," Tils growled. "Just tell me why we can't use drugs?"

"Well, drugs upset the known rhythms—the more severe the drug, the greater the upset. Drugs cause greater interflow and merging, which makes the separation of the various lines much more difficult, if not impossible. At least with present techniques. And unless we can get a reasonably clear definition to stretch and relate to phonetic correspondence, we cannot produce a coherent composition."

"Oh? Well have you got a better idea? It's no good questioning him while he has his wits about him, is it? Do you think we'll get anywhere that way?"

"Ah, perhaps not with the rapidity you require . . ."

"That's it then. We'll dose him. In stages. And let him talk as well this time. Same questions, unless we get something out of him. And we'd better get something out of him." He snatched up the report. "What did we get here? Nothing. Except to the first question. Mention of Gregor, whoever he is. And clearance. He'll be a contact for sure. Slim. But it *does* give us something to work on . . ."

"Who is Gregor?"

"Gregor? Gregor is . . . is Gregor."

"No other name?"

"No. Just . . . Gregor."

"Where is he?"

"Where?"

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"Yes. Tell me, where is Gregor?"

Vanstead gazed wide-eyed into blackness. He was feeling lightheaded, disembodied. The question came again. "Where is Gregor? He is in danger. We have to get a message to him urgently. Vanstead, do you hear me?"

"Yuh. Yes." Vanstead knew peculiar detachment. He was floating. Nothing was important any more.

"We must reach Gregor. His life is at stake. Vanstead, you must tell us where we can find him."

"Yes. Yes. Gregor," Vanstead slurred. "Mustn't . . . hurt Gregor. He's due . . . due . . ."

"When does he arrive, Vanstead?"

"When?" Vanstead searched his mind. "Wednesday, I think. Wednesday."

"Good, good. And who is going to meet him?"

"Oh." Vanstead paused for thought. "Jeffers and . . . and Carol, maybe. Not me. Silly that. After clearance." He lapsed into silence.

"Damned drugs!" Tils hissed. "Vanstead! Pay attention! This is vital. Is Gregor coming to take charge of the D.F.D. organization here?"

"D.F.D.?" Vanstead muttered. "D.F.D. D.F.D. Gregor? No, no. Lonesome Gregor. Poor Gregor. Back so soon. After waiting. So long. So long." He drifted off.

"Vanstead, listen to me! Who are those who will be working most closely with Gregor?"

"Closely? Working? Oh, Carol and Jeffers, I guess. Tony sometimes, maybe. While he's here."

"Tony?" Tils said sharply. "Tony who?"

"Tony. Only one Tony."

"What's his other name?"

"Tony? Tony Shermore, of course. Good lad, Tony."

Tils and Schreuler exchanged significant glances.

For the duration of the session Tils hammered to extract more details about Gregor, Carol, Jeffers, Tony and the D.F.D. It was an exhausting cross-examination which supplied an amazing abundance of tantalizing ambiguity. And Vanstead's doped contentment seemed to aggravate the situation somehow.

"Anything?" Tils barked.

Schreuler closed the door. "It is, ah, as I feared it might be. What is intelligible more or less corresponds with the facts you have already elicited."

"Hah!" Tils thumped his desk angrily and stood up. "What use is your device then, hey? We don't need it to learn what we can learn by other means at our disposal."

"Those other means are not satisfactory," Schreuler reminded him. "Drugs affect various people differently, and there could be some truth in the rumor of immunization by some confounding semicounter-

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active agent. I warned you that his reaction under such treatment was likely to be a detriment to his recording."

"Yes, yes, yes, but we had to try, didn't we? There must be some way. You have perfected the instrument that investigatory forces all over the world have longed to obtain. To know what a suspect is thinking! And here we have a suspect, a prime suspect, and still he is withholding his more valuable information from us. There *must* be a way to get it out of him, to *make* him think the way we want him to."

"Prolonged mental assault and physical debilitation could probably bring him to a point of high suggestibility . . ."

"Of course it would, you fool, and who'd need your fancy comparison code then? He'd babble it out on request as fast as he could. No, we want the results of unguarded thinking."

"Knowing that the sensing-cap is affixed to the head is unavoidable—although perhaps the area could be anesthetized."

"*Now* you think of it," Tils groused. "What we want is something that arouses no suspicion in the mind at all, no attachments and foodads."

"A great deal more research will have to be done before we reach that stage," Schreuler said. "The waves dissipate markedly on the square of radiant proximity, with consequent co-mingling of extraneous and disparate local transmission. Eventually we may devise long-range sensors and effective sealant walls, but that, with the interpretation of the visualization stream, is, as yet, quite some way off."

"Yes, yes, yes, so we have to use what method we have right now," Tils said. "It should be good enough, heaven knows. I thought by now that we'd have enough data to incriminate a whole gang. But what have we got? Carol, who is probably Carol Dewlish, his secretary. Arnold Jeffers, the Embassy chauffeur, and Tony Shermore, the ambassador's son. And they're just names tied to this mysterious Gregor, who is coming into the country sometime tomorrow. We have no idea what their plans are, but they're obviously up to something. Gregor is clearly a code name. For the moment we'll just have to watch and hope for the best."

"Perhaps if we were to question Vanstead with greater intensity we . . ."

"No. He's too clever. We've given too much away already. Strong representation is being made for his release, and, if we can't get anything out of him in the next twenty-four hours we'll have to let him go."

"What do you propose we do?"

"Well, he's bound to think of the predicament he's in sooner or later," Tils grated, "so you'll make

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a record of every thought he has while he remains in our custody."

"What? But . . . But . . ." Schreuler protested, "my equipment is only operational for twenty minutes at a time. That's the maximum. It's still highly experimental . . ."

"Keep repeating, then, over and over. I want every word he thinks. He must slip up some time."

"But I haven't enough charts, and . . ."

"Don't give me excuses! Get it set up as best you can! Keep him strapped down—and that idea about anesthetizing the outside of his head, use that. It might fool him."

"But . . ."

"Don't argue, Doctor! Get your whole team on it. Give him stuff in his feeder to keep him awake, and try as much as possible to convince him that he is alone."

Dr. Schreuler clasped his unrequired latest report to his chest and blinked.

"Go, Doctor. Move! We want to get as much as we possibly can."

"Yes." Schreuler dithered momentarily. "Yes, very well. We'll do the best we can." And he went.

Vanstead sucked on his feeder tube. A glucose-admixture, he guessed. Very likely doped. But he was hungry, and as he was at their mercy for hypodermics, enforced intake and what-all, he saw no real objection to imbibing.

The pads were still upon his eyes, and there was something strange about his head. He twitched his eyebrows, wrinkled his forehead, tried to stretch his scalp. There was a lack of sensation there. He added his observations together and made a tentative four. He was being left alone and his assumptions seemed harmless enough, and so for want of other surmise he made it his considered pastime to wonder just what he *would* think if he knew that his mind was being read.

Vanstead thought about the matter with some devotion.

Tils switched the intercom. "Doctor!" he bawled. "Oh, there you are," as the door opened to admit Schreuler with yet another bundle of hastily-prepared reconstituted speech.

"Doctor, I'm beginning to have my doubts about this." From his early random ramblings, Vanstead's thoughts had gradually become more present-oriented, and a spark of hope had been born in Tils' breast to grow into the flame of elation as each succeeding report became more precisely edifying to his particular interests. However, from the last two reports, certain aspects had struck a chord of dubiety within him, and his mood had changed accordingly. "That last report named Hemmelmecker, André himself! as the chief controller here of the D.F.D.! Rendin, and Undersecretary Podlid,

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and . . . and . . . Why, it can't be true! André is *our* chief, and the suggestion that he could be a double-agent is . . . is ludicrous. Isn't it?"

Schreuler nodded gloomily. "In this one he names Gallburger himself as a messenger for the D.F.D."

"What?"

"Also," Schreuler continued glumly, "Fautnas has identified those peculiar passages that we have had trouble deciphering. It was not his native tongue, but French."

"Oh? And," Tils did not care for the expression on the doctor's face but he asked anyway, "what was their meaning?"

"Fautnas states emphatically that unmistakably they are common Gallic nursery rhymes."

Tils's fists clenched as a beggar's on a dollar. For a full thirty seconds he let pressure build behind his eyeballs. "I'll kill him," he breathed.

"In this one," Schreuler held his latest formulation with a measure of distaste, "he appears to be playing a game called 'Forfeits' with himself, something that seems to involve the determining of what is true and . . . what is false . . ."

"I'll kill him!" Tils cried. "He's been playing with *us!* I'll . . . Do you realize that, if I'd started work on him in the ordinary way, I'd be far more advanced than I am now? To hell with the consequences! I'd at least have had the satisfaction of . . . Are you aware that he is laughing at us? André, by god! And the others! Lies, all lies!" He smashed his fist onto the desk. "All that work! All that . . . Gaah!" His arm swept the heap of reports to the floor. "Rubbish!"

"With modification and development . . ." Schreuler began.

"Hah! He knows! He's guessed!" Tils tugged the hem of his uniform jacket to smooth it over his now outraged chest. "I was afraid this might happen. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has been calling every two minutes. Now that the case has collapsed," he fumed, "they'll expect *me* to blasted-well smooth it out. You and your mind reader!"

"You perhaps expected too much . . ."

"It's useless. And now we're in a mess. I need *my* head read," he said savagely. "It's been a fiasco, admit it. Now we'll have to start placating everybody. In the time we have left we'll have to try and *un*persuade Vanstead of what he knows." His jaw jutted. "He's been sick. We've been taking care of him," Tils spat. "And I suppose we'll have to don our most complacent smirks to suggest that we are completely satisfied with whatever it is they might care to think we've achieved."

Tils hooted, "All we have to show for two days' work is the name Gregor and the mystery of his unspecified assignment. Hah!

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Come on," he said angrily, fastening the hooks on his collar, "let us set about preparing our prisoner for release in the hour or two remaining. Look pleasant, damn it, and smile with confidence . . ."

"The detention, you understand, was unfortunately necessary in order to clarify an error," Tils purred at his histrionic best. He showed little sign of fatigue. "Regrettable of course, but," he shrugged with magnificent philosophy, "these things do happen." He displayed fine examples of a dental mechanic's art, "We trust that Mr. Vanstead's sudden illness will not recur. I have our specialist's opinion here, and he considers that the faintness Mr. Vanstead appears to have suffered was caused by vascular constriction. He advises that Mr. Vanstead visit his own cardiologist as soon as possible when he returns home." Tils beamed. "You can be sure that we did our best for him while he was here, and he will attest, I think, that he has received no ill-usage?"

The stiffly formal diplomatic collecting party had brought along with them a large Dalmatian dog. Vanstead fondled its ears. "I was treated very well," he agreed dryly.

"Good." Tils seemed pleased. "We shall, of course, extend our deepest apologies through the usual channels, and we are, I can assure you, sincerely sorry to have mistakenly detained, *ha-ha,* the wrong man. Such circumstances," he gestured disarmingly, "can occur in any society."

Tils himself led the way to the door to show his visitors out. His maintained cordiality was marvelous, his attitude positively benign. "Your papers have been thoroughly vetted. *Tush!* It was a mere technicality, a stupidly overzealous official. He has, you may be sure, been severely reprimanded. I have arranged that your exit shall be as expeditious as you might desire."

"Thank you," Vanstead said.

Tils held the door open, a genial commissionaire. The party began to file out.

"Fine dog," Tils commented amiably to Vanstead. The master touch, he bent to pat the animal's head.

"Yes. I stayed here longer than I anticipated, and sent for him." Vanstead matched Tils, smile for smile. "And now here he is just out of quarantine, and I've been recalled. So we must part once again."

"Oh, what a shame," Tils commiserated.

"Yes, isn't it?" Vanstead said, walking through. He turned his head and called the dog. "Here, Gregor, heel boy." And he gave another engaging smile to Tils. "Thanks for your hospitality."

Tils managed to close the door before his affable front slipped entirely. ■

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the reference library

P. Schuyler Miller

THE MAINLINERS

It seems to me that a good part of the "New Thing" in S.F.—using the initials now to mean "Speculative Fiction" or even, as in Judith Merril's last-year's commentary, "Speculative Fabulation"—it seems to me that the "New" S.F. is self-consciously concerned with making itself as much as possible like "mainline" fiction, which is very unlike the fiction on which we "over 30's" were brought up. But that is another column; at the moment, I am concerned with the fact that some mainline fiction is playing around with the themes and techniques of science fiction, and often doing it quite well. The really bad botches I don't report here, nor the perhaps major fraction that are fantasy rather than science fiction.

Of the "serious" novels of the last few months that have a standard science-fiction theme, the best I have seen is "They," by Marya Mannes (Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y.; 1968; 215 pp.; $4.95). I believe it is Miss Mannes' first novel; her field has been social commentary, and that is, of course, what her "story" is.

"They" are the young, the under-30's, who in our near future have taken over America and perhaps much of the world. They rise to overthrow a short-lived military-industrial dictatorship which soon seizes power, and then—realizing good Hippie/Yippie doctrine—proceed to reject the past by destroying the past. The old are immolated at fifty, in community warrens or in a very few cases, like that of the book, in prisons of their own selection. If they are unfit at sixty, they are disposed of. In any case, they have a choice of suicide or execution at sixty-five.

The skeletal story follows the fortunes of three men and two women spending their last years together in an old house on an oddly deserted part of the Connecticut coast. (They see very little and know very little of Their world—a flaw, since there must be a continual dribble of people out of youth into age, able to bring news from "outside.") Miss Mannes is no novelist, and her five people—and the strange sixth who joins them near the end—are just

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as much cardboard types as the characters of any "typical" science-fiction story: A woman editor, who writes the journal of their last months. A European-born conductor. A popular song writer. An artist, and his mistress/model. The conductor is arrogant. The artist is foul-mouthed. The model is a middle-class clod who takes care of the housekeeping, and good enough for her. They are not really differentiated . . . which just may be intentional, for they can all chime into the chorus which is the book's real purpose. They become the spokesmen for "our" generation, trying to impart to Them what it is that we value and enjoy in a world and a society that does have roots, that has evolved to fit the character of mankind and of the Earth. Call it a sermon, a eulogy. The prologue and epilogue by Them hint that Their children are rebelling against nihilism and making the manuscript an underground gospel. Indeed, near the end, a mute Flower Child appears out of the sea to rescue the manuscript from the funeral pyre the five have built for themselves.

Not enough "happens" to make the book typical "science fiction," but would any of Them read it if it were not tricked out as a story? Would anybody listen?

Michael Frayn's "A Very Private Life" (Viking Press, New York; 1968; 132 pp.; $4.50) hews much more closely to "our" stereotypes. Frayn is an English writer whose other books I haven't read; "The Tin Men" is to be out soon in a paperback edition. His story begins, "Once upon a time there will be a little girl called Uncumber"—then sails straight on into a mocking satire on the way we are immolating ourselves. In pure science fictional extrapolation we watch Uncumber grow up as a respectable Insider, living happily and comfortably in her little buried room, fed by machines, "visiting" her relatives by television. Then she gets a wrong number and falls in love with the utterly unlovable Outsider who appears on the screen. She sets out to cross the world and find him, in a crumbling ghetto somewhere on the shores of the Mediterranean. She lives for a little Outside, and finds it horrible. The satire is sharp and cruel and lubricated with black humor, and I think you'll like it.

Finally—though I have no taste for poetry and no qualifications for judging it—a newspaperman, E. G. Valens, has attempted to extract the essence of space voyaging in a rather short poem he calls "Cybernaut" (Viking Press; 1968; 46 pp.; $3.50). You may want to look it up. The pilot of the *Nina II* has been far out into space—has found it totally empty—and is returning to Earth. The poem is a spill of images, clear and sharp, seeming to say—to me, anyway—that in all of space, only Earth

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matters, that space-faring Man will have only his memories for company there.

Which brings us full-circle again to "They," where Marya Mannes is saying as clearly as she knows how that Man's memories *are* Man, that they give our society and our civilization their quality and meaning, and that a generation that immolates itself in the present is throwing itself out into empty space in a *Nina II* that will not return to Earth.

NEBULA AWARD STORIES THREE

Edited by Roger Zelazny • Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y. • 1968 • 272 pp. • $4.95

The Nebula awards are made by the Science Fiction Writers of America. The shorter award winners—novella, novelette and short story—and a few of the runners-up are published in these annual anthologies. The 1967 winners in the three categories are Michael Moorcock's "Behold the Man," Fritz Leiber's "Gonna Roll the Bones," and Samuel R. Delaney's "Aye, And Gomorrah." Of these, the Leiber story is out-and-out deal-with-the-Devil fantasy; the other two are excellent off-track science fiction.

Anne McCaffrey's "Weyr Search," from Analog, was a Nebula runner-up but won the fans' "Hugo." It is reprinted, as are an excellent—and rare—future sport story, "Mirror of Ice," by "Gary Wright," who turns out to be Delaney under another name, and one of J.G. Ballard's strange Vermilion Sands stories, "The Cloud Sculptors of Coral D," in which artists in gliders go up to carve clouds into ephemeral statues for the jet set of a far future. (Delaney, for good measure, won the novel award for his "The Einstein Intersection," in which he fuses mathematics, music and the Orpheus legend.) The other runners-up are fantasy.

But to the winners. The Moorcock story is a strange and powerful time-travel story of a man who goes back to look for the historic Christ—and becomes the man who died on the cross. "Aye, And Gomorrah" extrapolates a future in which spacemen are surgically neutered to prevent their spreading genetic damage into the gene pool . . . and a psychopathic society responds by evolving "frelks" who are queer for the neuters. The story is written with the understanding and good taste that you always get from Delaney. His pseudonymous "Mirror of Ice"—powered one-man sledding as a cruel, soul-destroying "sport" of the future—will convince you that a good mechanic could build one of the sleds tomorrow. It would be right at home here in Analog.

As for the two fantasies, they are well done but not Analog fodder.

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HAWKSBILL STATION

By Robert Silverberg • Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y. • 1968 • 166 pp. • $3.95

The original *Galaxy* novelette or novella that bore this title and introduced the story was and is a prime example of the "new" Robert Silverberg. If you read it, you recall that it deals with a prison colony established in the Cambrian era by way of one-way time travel, and of the intricate and tense interrelationships of the men in this solitary exile. It was one of the best SF stories of recent years.

This book is the same story, rounded out and enlarged by filling in the lives and background of several of the principal characters. I don't know whether the novella was a condensation of the book, but if it was, it was a masterly job . . . because I don't think the added material adds very much to the story or the portrayal of a tormented society. As with Sturgeon's great "Baby Is Three" and Clarke's "Against the Fall of Night," the shorter story may have a long future life of its own, parallel with the book.

If you didn't read the short version, though, don't miss the book.

THE GOBLIN RESERVATION

By Clifford D. Simak • G. P. Putman's Sons, New York • 1968 • 192 pp. • $4.95

If Clifford Simak tells us that the development of time travel enables future explorers to bring back all the critters of mythology from the past, I am willing to believe him. But that's just the bizarre and often joyous setting for a save-the-Earth yarn that moves fast and freely in many directions.

Peter Maxwell has been sent, via matter-transmitter, to a distant and perplexing world. But there was a flyspeck on a transistor, or something equally hazardous and unexpected, so *two* Peter Maxwells returned—at different times. The first was killed, so Number Two found it rather difficult to persuade the authorities to recognize his existence, let alone give him back his job, his bank account, and his position in the academic world. How he regains all these with the assistance of a retrieved Neanderthaler, Shakespeare, goblins, dragons, and such is the skeleton of a thoroughly enjoyable story. Because there are some extraterrestrial villains using all the "supernatural" hullabaloo as a smokescreen . . .

Just don't take it too seriously.

OPERATION MALACCA

By Joe Poyer • Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y. • 1968 • 208 pp. • $4.50

The first third of this pleasant yarn was published here in Analog in the issue of March, 1966. The rest *may* have preceded it in December of 1965 . . . my back

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copies aren't where I can check. Together they make an enjoyable action/spycraft story, rather like a mild James Bond with dolphins—or, rather, one talking dolphin, Charlie.

If you didn't read the story here, it's an avert-the-nuclear-war one. Allies of Red China have planted a hydrogen bomb at the bottom of the Straits of Malacca, where it will create a *tsunami* to make the effects of the Krakatoa eruption look like ducklings paddling in a basin. Maverick Mortimer Keilty, a psychologist who has learned to talk to dolphins, is summoned by the Navy to go get it. Since there has to be a story, he does . . . and in the course of events, Charlie spots a nuclear submarine lurking nearby, and they have to go get *that*.

Charlie is by far the most enjoyable of a generally congenial lot of characters. He should meet Penelope—from the Anderson novel of the same name, which my friends keep stealing.

THE AGE OF THE PUSSYFOOT

By Frederik Pohl • Trident Press, New York • 1969 • 191 pp. • $4.95

Unlike John Campbell, Frederik Pohl has no qualms about publishing his own work in his own magazines. ("Don A. Stuart," where are you?) This typical yarn about a man who goes into deep freeze and wakes up in the future has consequently appeared in *Galaxy* in 1965-'66.

Forrester is a volunteer fireman who died in our time of some very bad burns and is revived and repaired some centuries later with a quarter of a million dollars or so in the bank—and the problem of fitting himself into an extremely peculiar society. How seriously the author takes his projection, you will have to decide for yourself from his postscript. The "deep freeze" movement is already in existence (a speaker on the radio the other night said a dozen or so people are already on dry ice, if not in liquid helium). The effects of compound interest are—or were once—8th Grade arithmetic. But I am not sure that anyone else has combined them with the gradual increase of the standard of living, the cheapness of life that becomes inevitable when death is no longer permanent, the smoothing out of individualism that is necessary to the harmonious operation of a computerized economy, and other related goodies.

It's the mixture as before: not great, but good.

THE SWORD SWALLOWER

By Ron Goulart • Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y. • 1968 • 181 pp. • $4.50

Readers of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* need go no further; all or part of this outrageous frolic—one of the exploits of the Chameleon

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Corps—was published there. Anyone else who is willing to go along with the gags should have fun.

Members of the Chameleon Corps, in case you haven't encountered them, are shape changers—not really werewolves, but maybe with a few lycanthropic genes here and there in their chromosomes. With a minimum of cosmetic aid they can make themselves look like almost anyone—and corpsman Ben Jolson is one of the best. He is sent off to the fun-and-cemeteries planet, Esperanza, to find out who is snitching the Galaxy's top military brass. In the process he has to cope with very nearly every variety of profitable larceny known to an advanced civilization.

Ben's misadventures begin on a health farm where everything costs. In the course of events, he tangles with big-time "sportsmen" —who think he's a far better target than a lion—street gangs, a computer with the gambling habit, the planets necrophilous industry in all its ramifications, and some superpatriots. He is alternately helped and harassed by a beautiful female agent. The whole hooleydooley is somewhere six notches below "Retief."

SNOW WHITE AND THE GIANTS

By J. T. McIntosh • Avon Books, New York • No. S-347 • 159 pp. • 60¢

It's hard to realize that we have had almost a generation of new science-fiction readers who don't know this Scottish author of good SF, and it's good to hear from him again. The yarn was serialized in *If* a couple of years ago, and it may also have been published in England.

No messages here . . . no philosophical intricacies that I could detect . . . just a vigorous, perplexing variation of the standard time-travel gambits, expertly dressed up and never slowing down. "Snow White," the slight, dark girl named Miranda, turns up in an English village accompanied by a group of ruthless giants. They have obviously come from the future, but why they have come, why they act as they do, and what they are trying to accomplish are questions that you have to stay with the book to discover. How death can be undone, the entanglement of past and future—the author is generous with complications.

Ride with McIntosh and see what an inventive author can do with standard materials.

THE DEMON BREED

By James H. Schmitz • Ace Books, New York • Ace Science Fiction Special No. H-105 • 157 pp. • 60¢

I won't have to say much about this Ace Special, except to point out that it is the book version of the story serialized here last year as "The Tuvela." If you weren't

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reading Analog at the time, get the book now. If you were, and don't keep the magazine, you may want the book.

We have, again, one of the worlds and bizarre societies of the Hub—the space-strewn human empire that Schmitz uses in most of his stories. This is a sea world with small continents, a secondary society of sea nomads, and the floating islands of entangled vegetation where invading and innately ruthless monsters, the Parahuans, are getting ready to take over the planet. They have trapped one scientist, and he has half-convinced them of the existence of super-beings known as the Tuvelas, who will come to his rescue. The Tuvela who does come is one smart, inventive and determined Schmitz heroine, accompanied by a team of mutant otters almost as smart as she is.

The Schmitz stories have a flavor all their own, and while there are others I like better, this is well above the average.

THE UNDERPEOPLE

By Cordwainer Smith • Pyramid Books, New York • No. X-1910 • 159 pp. • 60¢

It is no longer a secret that "Cordwainer Smith" was the late Professor Paul M. A. Linebarger, economist, political scientist, and one of the most remarkable science-fiction writers of recent years. This "novel," evidently expanded from some previously published short stories (e.g. "The Store of Heart's Desire" in *If*), carries on the experiences of Rod McBann, "The Planet Buyer" of the earlier book, the extraordinary young rancher of Old North Australia who bought the Earth and has come, in this book, to examine his purchase.

Cordwainer Smith's special technique of looking at his vastly complex, vastly strange future universe from many different angles and through many different sets of eyes has been most effective in his shorter stories. "The Space Lords," which Pyramid has reissued as a companion book (No. X-1911), is far more memorable. Even so, the increasing entanglement of McBann, disguised as a cat-man and accompanied by the Joan of Arc if the Underpeople, C'mell, with the Lords of the Instrumentality, the cause of the animals-made-people, the mysterious and terribly powerful being known as E-telekeli . . . all these and more make the book unlike anything you're likely to find, except the other "Smith" books. Get them all, wherever you can find them, and read them all. Some day, some hardback publisher will collect all the stories, put them in some kind of order, add such revealing fragments as the introduction and postscript to "The Space Lords," and give us a set of classics that are literature as well as science fiction.

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brass tacks

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Generally I enjoy your editorials tremendously, usually I agree with you, and often I think you show excellent insight on particular problems. Your proposal for licensing quacks is perhaps the best idea in medicine since anesthesia! HOWEVER, occasionally your personal emotions seem to ride roughshod over the facts. The smoking-health issue is one example, but this time I'd like to concentrate on gun controls.

Your January editorial argued that laws controlling guns are, at best, useless and, at worst, actually harmful. But your argument is very similar to an argument that laws against possession of burglar tools are bad because they lull people into believing falsely that the burglary problem is solved.

I agree with you that more effective law enforcement is needed, and that the death penalty is not too severe for *premeditated* or *repeated* murder, but I would rather *prevent* a murder than punish the killer. A logical move would be to outlaw virtually all hand guns except those used by law enforcement officers and special guards. If the following argument seems familiar, refer to your January editorial.

Known or suspected felons were responsible for only 21.5% of the murders in the U.S.A. in 1967.

The problem is not murderers.

The problem is guns.

The problem is the availability of efficient weapons of destruction to people who are temporarily very angry.

Banning handguns is not intended to stop all killing; nobody ever considered it would. It's intended to reduce the effectiveness of an aggravated assault by limiting the availability of efficient weapons.

Fools have said that because gun controls can be circumvented—as in Problems 1 through 4 of your editorial—controls are, therefore, useless. This is like saying that, because controls on flammable clothing cannot prevent all death by fire, there's no use for laws against highly flammable sweaters. (By the way, I cannot recall ever

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having read of any instance in which a sweater killed a human being, either.)

Sure . . . there are some people who would feel terribly inconvenienced at having to give up their handguns. But their inconvenience is far less than that of the thousands killed by handguns each year —not to mention their relatives and friends. Nothing human is perfect; therefore, design for *optimum function*—the greatest good for the most people.

In 1967 there were 12,090 murders in the U.S.A. (all statistics used here are from the Uniform Crime Reports.) Known or suspected felons were responsible for just 21.5% of those murders, while handguns were used in 48%. If we assume, as opponents of gun controls often do, that no felon is inhibited by a ban on handguns, and that felons always use handguns for their murders, that still leaves 26.5% of the murderers being supposedly law-abiding citizens who happened to have a gun handy. Even if we assume that half of these citizens manage to find an illegal gun before they cool down, the other 1,601 must choose some other means of assault. And since other means are only one-sixth as effective as assault by gun—comparing aggravated assault statistics to murder statistics—we must conclude that 1,334 of these intended victims would survive.

Therefore, John, I consider you and other opponents of gun control legislation collectively responsible for *at least* one thousand three hundred and thirty-four deaths during every year that gun control legislation is defeated. This is based on very conservative calculations of murders alone, and does not include the many accidental deaths. The true total may be staggering.

I hope that this argument convinces you of the worth of gun control legislation. If not, I still hope that you print this letter to let your readers see the other side of the story.

CHARLES GASTON
12401 Vinton Terrace
Wheaton, Maryland 20906

I repeat: The desire to kill—not the specific means used—is what we must control. Lizzy Borden used an axe. Lady McBeth did it with a knife. Cain used a club. Automobiles make fine weapons. It's not the weapon that is important! It's the desire.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

For shame, pish-tush, and all that rot . . . Everyone in the sociological world knows that if guns are abolished there will be an end to murder and violence . . .

Which leads one to the comment by Fred Bear, the archery manufacturer, that in his opinion more people have been done in by archery than gunpowder. Your mention of the ease of explosive making leads into discussion of an

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Army manual which has a long list of items that must be considered for control, if someone is doing guerrilla work. The only one I'll mention is plaster of paris, though it beats me how that could explode. Most of the list are known to any fireman as potential hazards blithely ignored by lawmakers.

Crossbows were used somewhat in WWII, a few being made by the Aussies from old Aussin springs. Range 200 yards plus.

As for Genghis Khan, he wasn't murderous except for effect. Give in peacefully and he only picked off the leaders. Fight, and all died. "That will happen which will happen. Only God knows." Also note that where his armies passed, desolation remained for long periods. Some places depended on carefully tended irrigation systems for life. When the people who kept this up died, the system died too. Many places supported far more people before Genghis came than some do even now. It does not take radiological poison to sterilize an area.

To return to guns, one of the most avid hoplophobe senators issued a list of nations which did not lose too many of its citizens through villainous saltpeter. England featured, and so did other lands like Japan, where murder is rare except with cold steel. The one at the foot of the list got me, though . . . the most heavily armed nation per capita in Europe, maybe the world. Where each house more often than not has a full-automatic weapon racked in the hall closet along with a combat load of ammunition. Their rate of murder or even accidental death by shooting is remarkably low. What nation? Peaceful Switzerland. The practical Swiss keep out of other people's wars, as a nation. However, being practical, they place their faith in treaties *and* back them with armament. They could never beat a major power, any more than the Boers could. But, like the Boers, they intend it should cost like hell. Being heavily armed, they take the view that all who have guns around must be taught the safe use of them. Swiss civic responsibility is extremely high, as well. Too bad ours isn't. They just had their first student riot in ages the other day, too.

JOHN P. CONLON
52 Columbia Street
Newark, Ohio 43055

But a little plaster in the wrong place can raise Hell! Like on the overload relays—in a safety valve.

Dear Sir:

The December 1968 issue is a good one. It is tragic that the undeveloped countries could not be governed by the logic of the editorial.

This reminds me of the cuniform text from Sumer, written about forty-five hundred years ago. Free translation, "The world is going to the dogs. Taxes are far too high.

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Children no longer obey their parents. *And everyone wants an easy job!"*

In Brass Tacks Mr. W. B. Whitham writes about the "brain drain." That is what happened to Greece and Macedonia after Alexander died about 300 B.C. The educated people went *abroad to educate the world.*

It seems to me that the premier position of Athens was due to the fact that her population was made up of people of many tribes, as we are told in the story of Thesus. In other words, they were hybrids and hybrid vigor was apparent. This same hybrid vigor began to show up ten or twelve thousand years ago, when the many small tribes followed the retreating ice north and came into contact with each other and interbred.

The same thing has happened in Hawaii, and for that matter, in the U. S.

I am an old man, and dislike many changes I have seen, but have high hopes that many of our problems will be solved reasonably soon, and others will be in the future.

G. T. SCOTT

Route 3, Box 11
Clemmons, North Carolina 27012

Evidently the old Sumerian was right. Sumer certainly disintegrated, anyhow!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I recently picked up the January issue of Analog at the local newsstand. I am always interested in your editorials, which I usually share with the people I work with just to see what their reactions are —they are usually anger. I am also very interested by the letters you receive and your responses. I would like to comment on one letter in this January issue that really grabbed my attention.

Mr. Ed Bolson made suggestions on how to get the un-thinking populous to start thinking. His suggestion was the logical one of answering a question with a question that the inquirer knows the answer to and which will lead him to the answer he wants. It is a case of making the inquirer see that he does have the data he needs and that he can stretch that data out to learn new things.

I was wonderfully pleased to see that Mr. Bolson suggests this method for teaching students. There is, however one definite hang up. Having experienced both public and private schools, I have discovered that public school teachers, in general, cannot teach people to think because they can't think. It is sad, because a majority of our young people go to public schools.

I am not saying that public school teachers aren't any good. I am saying that the public school teachers that can think are forced puppets. They must do what the Boards tell them to do, and could be in serious trouble if they stray from the normal pattern.

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We had a recent case of this situation in this area. A young teacher, he was a thinker and wanted his students to think for themselves and to look at things from different views, not the one that was always harped on. This young teacher, in a discussion, suggested something to the effect that Jesus might be considered the first "hippy" as He left society to preach love and peace because this is what He believed. This instructor was making his students think about something.

It didn't take long; parents were up in arms. The Board of Education was in a state of fits. What was even worse was the fact that this teacher's records were opened to the public. It was a crime, the chaos that occurred because a teacher stated an idea and gave the students something to think about. One teacher wanted the students to THINK . . . maybe it is a crime.

How can one possibly teach original thinking when one's own is so very restricted?

Mr. Bolson missed one little fact that I believe exists. It is my very strong opinion that not everyone, even if extremely intelligent, can use this question for question—or as you labeled it, Socratic—method for teaching. I believe only a very *wise* and widely educated individual can use this method for the education of others. I wish that all teachers could use this as a method for teaching as it is such a fine method. I fear, however, that this is a "special individual's" trick, with only certain individuals—too few, I might add—allotted the talent to use it.

LESLYN CAMPBELL
236 Nottingham Road
Dayton, Ohio

Modern populations aren't quite as final in their disapproval of teachers who teach thinking; in the case you mention the teacher was not forced to drink the hemlock. Otherwise, things haven't changed much.

Incidentally, Jesus used the other method of arousing thought—stories, called parables. They got Him, too.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

Your January editorial on crime and gun control was excellent, but I must disagree with one aspect of it. You state that the "death penalty for murder makes a great deal of sense; most people prefer not to die, and the stronger the probability that a certain act, murder, will lead to execution, the less attractive murder will appear." Later you assert that capital punishment "is not mere angry vengeance; it helps to eliminate from the human gene pool individuals who do not have the gene for conscience. It assures that one murder is all the killer has a chance to commit."

This same philosophy was applied in Merrie Old England, not only to murder, but also to such undesirables as horse thieving,

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pocket picking, fornication, and petty larceny. Capital punishment was considered a very good deterrent to crime—*in theory*. However, people started to wonder after a while when it was noticed that the crowds gathered to watch the public hanging of pickpockets—supposedly as a deterrent to pickpockets—were excellent targets for the colleagues of the center of attention. In other words, pickpockets were not deterred at all by the hanging.

Still, capital punishment continued to be widely practiced for a variety of crimes. Probably the turning point came when a widely publicized event occurred which revolted even the most hardened consciences of the day. An eight-year-old girl, caught stealing a loaf of bread, was sentenced to hang. However, her own weight was not enough to snap her neck when she was dropped through the scaffold, so the hangman climbed down, put his hands over her shoulders, and added his own weight to hers until she strangled to death.

It seems to me only logical that if you believe crime is genetically controlled, you should want to stamp it out wherever it is encountered, and therefore I wonder that you don't advocate capital punishment for every offense. But perhaps only murder is a serious enough crime that it deserves capital punishment.

I must disagree. You state, "Sure, there's some degree of probability a few innocent men will be wrongfully convicted and executed." Then you minimize the importance of such errors. But you overlook an alternative to execution which would serve as well, without the drawbacks. I speak of life imprisonment without possibility of parole. It would keep your murderers out of the gene pool, but still let innocent men be freed after several years. Execution, obviously, would not offer the same advantage.

Some people, in defense of capital punishment, have brought in the economic angle, claiming that a prisoner's lifetime support is more expensive than a few pounds of cyanide or a couple more kilowatts of electricity on the monthly power bill. This argument fails when one considers the very appreciable expense involved in all the numerous appeals and hearings which almost invariably accompany a capital sentence.

I write all this because I was at one time a strong supporter of capital punishment myself, but my mind was changed by the American Civil Liberties Union. Now I believe execution is wrong, if only because it is irreparable.

The rest of your editorial was, however, magnificent. The problem is to translate it from theory to fact, and that can only take place when the public is willing to pay through the nose for intelligent, skilled, well trained, and highly

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conscienced policemen; when people start to feel that crime prevention, as well as crime reporting, is *their* business; and when obsolete sex laws, anti-gambling statutes, and vagrancy ordinances are repealed, thereby freeing enforcement officials to concentrate on crimes of violence. I do not look for this day to come soon.

Thank you for your work on behalf of its eventual arrival.

RICHARD S. RUSSELL
221 Lake Street
Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701

I did not suggest punishment would end crime abruptly, save with respect to individuals, but that it was a deterrent. Many steeplejacks operate successfully, skyscraper window washers are very well paid, too—but there's a tendency to avoid those occupations, because insurance is so hard to get.

No human system is—or is going to be!—perfect. Life's full of risks; don't be so foolish as to suppose it isn't! Innocent men get killed in traffic, by machine tools, by lightning. Theoretically, all could be totally prevented. Let's face it; human life is indeed valuable—but not infinitely so, or we'd stop traffic deaths, and live under grounded metal Faraday cage screens.

As to cost of appeals . . . the longer the criminal lives in jail, the longer he's around to file new appeals and petitions. You don't think you'd reduce appeals by life imprisonment, do you?

EDITORIAL

continued from page 6

ment for high-sugar-content candies. Yet the dentists have stated, for years, that it's the soft, or soluble sugary candy foods that lead to tooth decay. Those ads are obviously directed at perverting children to the dangerous practice of enjoying sweets. "Off with their ads!" Let them be banned from the air waves!

I suspect the FCC is going to run into some opposition from the somewhat more realistically minded men in Congress. For one thing, Congress would not be too happy about cutting off the government's large, steady flow of income from cigarette taxes. For another, most congressmen and senators smoke themselves, and haven't quite appreciated what a terrible, dangerous practice it is. They're a little hard to scare, anyway; any man who's fought off opposition and attackers long enough and determinedly enough to reach the Senate doesn't scare easily.

The present tobacco problem is quite unlike the alcohol problem of sixty years ago. Then, the WCTU was a popular movement—the women citizenry were aroused, and sought to lynch the Demon Rum, led by that noble hatchet-woman Carrie Nation.

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This time the lynch mob is a rather small, though close-knit mob of intellectuals and statistics-grubbers. They lack real popular support. They're just as dedicated to their Cause as old Carrie Nation was to hers, just as one-sided, and just as determined—but it's more of an intellectual determination, and not very popular.

One of the things that hasn't been looked at even, let alone studied in anything approaching a scientific manner, is the question of "habituation" to tobacco. The "it's just a habit" cry is continued—without any research a scientist could recognize as such, and even without a definition of "habit."

One of the standard definitions of a "narcotic" as distinct from a simple "analgesic" is that a narcotic is habit-forming—"it produces physiological changes, leading to habituation such that withdrawal is followed by more or less severe withdrawal symptoms."

On this basis, the most habit-forming of all substances is one which is known to establish an unbreakable, life-long addiction with the first dose; the withdrawal symptoms are extremely severe, and if continued for any length of time, invariably fatal. This extremely habit-forming substance is called oxygen.

O.K.—so this isn't what the doctors *mean* by "habit-forming." But it's what they're saying; until they straighten out their definitions, they're working with a semantic system that makes scientific statement impossible. What do they *mean* when they say "It's just a habit," then?

Herein I speak from direct personal experience; tobacco is not habit-forming, and discontinuation causes no withdrawal symptoms whatever. I know that for a fact, because I was a two-plus pack-a-day smoker for some forty years. Last year, my family, friends, physician, and neighbors finally gave up trying to argue me into stopping. Since I had finally been granted freedom of choice—I decided to try quitting. So I did. I now smoke about two a day—I find I genuinely enjoy one after breakfast, and sometimes after dinner. My stopping is not an hysterical "don't touch one or you can't stop" affair, characteristic of the alcoholic or heroin addict that's cured himself.

Since this is a direct experience, I know it is true.

Yes . . . only it's a *personal* experience, and applies only to individuals who just happen to have the particular kind of metabolism I appear to have. No pills involved, no substitutes—I carried a pack of cigarettes and my holder with me for the first couple of months and had no problem whatever not using them.

But just because I happen to be that kind of metabolic freak doesn't mean that the guy who goes

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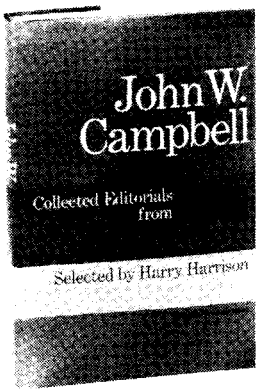

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through hell and hallelujah is "weak willed" or "kidding himself." It may mean that he has an entirely different trick of metabolism.

I know individuals who've given up smoking, had to sweat it out for months, then, at a party or something, smoked a couple cigarettes . . . and been hooked again. Just like an alcoholic or drug addict—they *do* have withdrawal symptoms, and true habituation.

As things stand now, doctors don't know what "the tobacco habit" means, because they have no quantized concept of "habit" and no workable definition of the term "habit-forming." Therefore, they can't tell a true tobacco addict, from someone who enjoys smoking. They can't tell me what trick of my metabolism made it completely painless to stop smoking —and can't help someone else to that trick, whatever it is. Is it because I also have a trick metabolism that produces gout? Do diabetics have a rugged time quitting, while gout tends to make it easy? Who's done any research?

Why is smoking enjoyable? Why did Mankind take up this improbable habit in the first place?

In a criminal trial case, an honest prosecutor seeks to learn means, motivation, and opportunity as well as identity.

A lynch mob doesn't need all that folderol—they just intuitively know who the varmint is, and set out to lynch him without further investigation.

Considering all the completely unstudied questions surrounding the Learned Lynchers seeking to do in

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the Demon Tobacco, one must acknowledge the far greater temperance and good sense of the WCTU in attacking the Demon Rum.

At least enough research had been done that the WCTU knew what led ordinary people to drink —though no one yet knows what makes an alcoholic, which is an anomalous condition of some drinkers. They did know the active principle—alcohol. There was enough research to know generally how it acted.

But the Learned Lynchers of the Demon Tobacco do not *know* that nicotine has anything whatever to do with the tobacco-effect smokers actually seek.

It's been pointed out that you can get drunk on gin and water, whiskey and water, rum and water, vodka and water, and bourbon and water, and this shows water is intoxicating.

O.K.—let's make some honest experiments; if nicotine is sprayed on dried cabbage leaves, and this is processed into cigarettes, do they satisfy the cigarette addict? If not —then nicotine is *not* what smokers want, and it's time someone found out what they do want.

Sure cigarettes contain nicotine; so what does that prove? They also contain a lot of cellulose, and a wild variety of other organic complex compounds.

Has anyone ever tried to find out what it is the smoker wants—instead of joining the Learned Lynchers and telling him it's nicotine he's after? Has anyone done any research to demonstrate the validity of their half-based guess that nicotine is all that's important?

No—as I say, the WCTU was far more temperate and scientific in their attack on the Demon Rum than the supposed-to-be and should-be scientists of the Learned Lynchers now attacking the Demon Tobacco.

It's rather startling to consider the WCTU's behavior as being a model of sound and objective behavior for "scientists" to learn from.

Fortunately, the great vested interest in tobacco sales will be somewhat more temperate in its actions than the Learned Lynchers. The vested interest with hundreds of millions of dollars of annual income at stake aren't going to let that go very easily.

The vested interest I refer to, of course, is not the manufacturers, but the government. It's the government, not the manufacturers, who make the great profits from cigarette sales. Taxes on a pack of cigarettes greatly exceed the manufacturer's small profit on his materials—and the taxes are all pure profit, with the manufacturers forced to act as tax collectors!

If it weren't for that great vested interest, the "Off with their ads!" fanatics would already have had their way. ■ The Editor.

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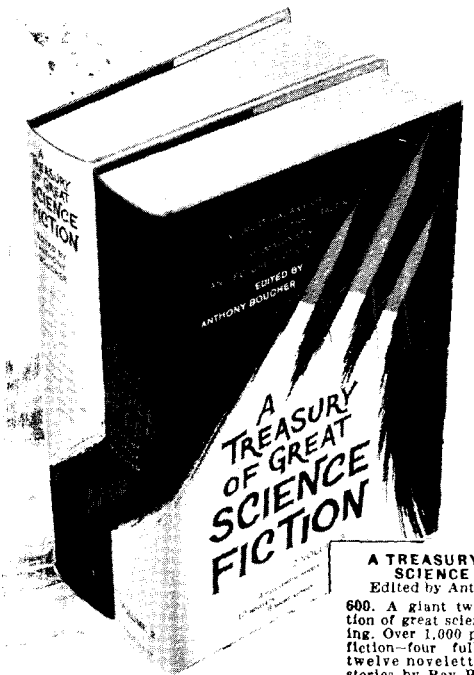

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